ESSAYS

VOLUME TWO

New Testament Essays

Dallas Burdette

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Essays

Volume 2

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About This Collection

This volume contains essays written by Dr. Dallas Burdette of Montgomery, Alabama, during the last decade of the 20th century and into the early 21st. They were published for a number of years on his website, Freedom in Christ, before being archived on Archive.org. They have been combined here into a single volume for ease of distribution.

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B. D. Lewis
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Table of Contents

Hebrews

If One Sins Willfully 6
Obey Them That Have The Rule Over You 17
The Purpose and Importance of the Sunday Assembly 104

Overview of NT Books

Overview of the Book of Ephesians 111
Overview of the Book of Galatians 124
Overview of the Book of Romans 158
Overview of the Gospel of Matthew 181

Philippians

God the Initiator—God Works in His People 208
God Works in You (1) 213
God Works in You (2) 219
God Works Through You 230
How Can Christians Rejoice in Times of Troubles 236
Saints in Christ Jesus 243
Shining Like Stars in the Universe 250
The Secret of Happiness—Jesus Christ 256
Working Out God's Amazing Salvation 263

Revelation

Date of Revelation 269
Identity and Character of the Beast of Revelation 286
Last Days in the Old and New Testaments 298
New Heaven and New Earth 318
The Revelation of Jesus to John 352

Romans

Overview of the Book of Romans 362
Raised From the Dead to Live a New Life 385
Righteousness of God—Imputed or Earned 393
The Spirit of Toleration for Differences 409
Watch Out For Those Who Cause Division 412
What the Bible Says About Saving Faith 434
Your Spiritual Act of Worship 439

Second Corinthians

A New Creation in Christ 447
All Christians—Ministers of Reconciliation 452

Second John

Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9 459

Second Peter

No Private Interpretation 473

Second Timothy

A Gospel Worth Suffering For 480

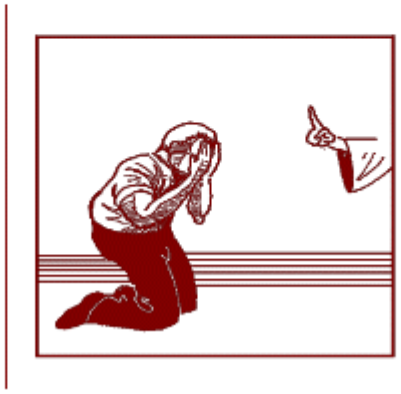
Titus

Who Are the Heretics 491

Acts

Humanity's Need—Christ the Savior of the World 504
Pentecost—The Birth of the Church 511
Salvation is Found in No One Else 519

If One Sins Willfully



Thrust Statement: **The sin of willfulness is associated with the rejection of Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of humanity.**

Scripture Reading: **Hebrews 10:26**

> For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins[1]

This Scripture alarms many Christians because they know that they have sinned many times "willfully." Is the author of Hebrews advancing the concept that if one sins willfully and knowingly that one cannot be forgiven? What is the writer intending to convey by this warning? If one prunes this text from its context, one might draw a conclusion that is not the intent of the author, who ultimately is the Holy Spirit. If one wishes to grasp the significance of this painful statement, one must seek to understand the concrete meaning of this text within its background. When one wrenches this passage from the entire Book of Hebrews, this separation from its environment makes it almost impossible to read correctly.

If one does just surface reading of this often-misunderstood Scripture, one discovers that this first superficial impression contradicts other Scriptures about forgiveness. Insight into this obscure citation must be gained from a wider reading. When one fails to treat a passage within its full unit, one can arrive at unsound teaching. One's understanding and application of a text is a historical process, a process that results in sound hermeneutical principles. When one examines **Hebrews 10:26** as a fragment from the entire book, one incurs the risk of diametrically opposing the teachings of Jesus and His apostles as well as the intent of the author of Hebrews..

This text does not teach that if one wilfully (΄Εκουσίως Jekousiws) sins, that is to say, he or she backslides or is overtaken in a fault then there is no hope for

forgiveness. The meaning of the author of Hebrews deals with a deliberate apostate decision, a decision that rejects Christ and His atonement and continues in this apostasy—a denial of Jesus and His vicarious suffering for the sins of humanity; in other words, this author is calling attention to those who renounce the Gospel and deny the Lord that bought them with His blood. If one deliberately gives up Jesus, who is the Gospel, for fear of persecution, then this individual has no other recourse for amnesty. The ones that the author of Hebrews is dealing with refer to those who had "received the knowledge of the truth" (**10:26**), that is, the Gospel of the kingdom. Jesus came not only proclaiming the Gospel, or Good News, of God's kingdom, but He Himself is the Gospel.

Just a perusal of this Book reveals that the writer is not discussing one overtaken in a fault (**Galatians 6:1**), or one who deliberately sins as in **1 Corinthians 5:1**; that is to say, one who has not rejected God's Gospel nor denied the Lord Jesus. For example, Paul, as just mentioned, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, addressed a willful and deliberate sin on the part of one of the brothers in Corinth—" a man has his father's wife" (**1 Corinthians 5:1**). The congregation was told not to associate with such a one (**5:9**). Apparently, this believer refused to cease his incestuous relationship with his father's wife, described as "sexual immorality among you" (**5:1**). Did this person use up his chance of forgiveness if he changed his ungodly behavior? No! In Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he addresses forgiveness to the sinner, especially this *willful* sin on the part of the saint in **1 Corinthian 5:1**. Listen to Paul as he sets forth his case about forgiveness of this strong-willed person:

> If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. [6] The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. [7] Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. [8] I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. [9] The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. [10] If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, [11] in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes (**2 Corinthians 2:5-7**).[2]

Undoubtedly, some did not want to extend the "right-hand of fellowship" to such a scoundrel, one who slept with his father's wife—a behavior that was so atrocious that even the heathens did not practice such conduct (**1 Corinthians 5:1**). Later, in his Second Epistle, he writes: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation" (**2 Corinthians 7:10**). The author of Hebrews is not calling attention to this kind of deliberate sin, but rather he is discussing one who alienates himself or herself from Christ, which also includes the Christian community (**Hebrews 10:25-26**). For Paul, there is a difference between a particular falling (such as set forth in **1Corinthians 5** and **Galatians 6:1**) and a complete defection from the Christian faith—faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Just a casual reading of the Book of Hebrews reveals that this author is focusing on one who renounces the death of Christ, which is not done by a particular offense. The sin that is committed ἑκουσίως [Jekousiws, "deliberately"] (**Hebrews 10:26**) concentrates on the total renunciation of

faith in Jesus as the final and ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. This rejection of Jesus leaves one without hope of the removal of sin.

Unfortunately, **Hebrews 10:26** is misread by many Christians. With surface reading of this controversial text, some have assumed that there is no forgiveness of deliberate sins, sins committed after one becomes a Christian. The inspired writer of this text is directing his attention to apostasy, not backsliding. The context of this most debated Scripture focuses on those who apostatize from their profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. In other words, if one turns from Calvary's atoning sacrifice and returns to Judaism, this one forfeits his or her forgiveness and bars himself or herself from access to God's throne of grace. Christ's sacrifice is the only means of sin's removal and access to the Throne of Grace. If one throws out Christ's atoning sacrifice, then only God's judgment of wrath remains. When one continues in this rejection of Jesus' sacrifice as a ransom to set him or her free from sins committed, one has no other means of forgiveness, or redemption.

On the other hand, if one casts off Christ and His atonement and later repents, one can still approach God's Throne of Grace. But if one steadfastly holds to his or her rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, then that person comes under God's condemnation. If any individual permanently repudiates Jesus as the one final sacrifice for sins, there is nothing left for the sinner. One cannot find safety in sacrifices in Judaism. It is in this vein that the author of Hebrews writes:

> For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. [25] Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. [26] Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. [27] Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, [28] so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (**Hebrews 9:24-28**).

Following the word *wilfully* is the word sin. What does this word *sin* convey? One should not interpret this word apart from its context. In other words, a single word has no meaning until it is put into a sentence context. Also, one's knowledge of the Greek word for "sin" employed by the author helps to clarify his intent. For example, the word for *sin* (ἁμαρτανόντων Jarmartanontwn) in the Greek text is a present active participle, which describes *continuous action*. In other words, the inspired writer is addressing not so much an *act* of apostasy as he is a *state* of apostasy.

Again, this idea of the present active participle centers on continuing in apostasy, not just the act of sinning. This individual's continuous action of apostasy centers on one who abandons Christ and turns away from God. This act of rebellion was a fixed and final departure from Jesus as God's Anointed One. The NIV captures this continuous action of unbelief: "keep on sinning." This sin is deliberate and continuous, no repentance—no turning back to Jesus. This sin is not sin in general, but

rather it is a specific sin; it is an abandonment of faith. This sin is a conscious attitude that parades disapproval for Jesus as God's Anointed One. This sin involves one's total denial of Peter's statement in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost concerning Jesus' mission and the Father's activity: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (**Acts 2:36**).

The adverb "willfully" grabs one's attention. This word *willfully* is first in this sentence, which position places emphasis. The adverb "willfully" (ἑκουσίως, Jekousiws, "willingly," "voluntary") is emphatic by its position, or word order (**Hebrews 10:26**), which is then followed by the present tense of the participle (ἁμαρτανόντων Jamartanontwn) for "sin,." which tense, as stated above, sets forth the habit of repeating the sin. This offence of desertion from Christ occurred after the reception of "the knowledge of the truth" (**10:26**). The word for knowledge in the Greek is ἐπίγνωσις (epignwsis, "full," "mature") rather than γνῶσις (gnwsis, "knowledge").

These individuals had been exposed to the "full knowledge" of the truth (ἀλήθεια, alhqeia) of the Good News of God's plan of salvation, which "truth" refers to the Jesus as the final atonement for the sins of humanity. In other words, this ἀλήθεια ("truth") is the saving truth of God's provision of salvation *in* and *through* Jesus by faith. In Greek, the word *truth* is in the genitive case (ἀληθείας, alhqeias). The genitive specifies the kind of quality of knowledge. This "truth" is not just truth in general, but the "truth" as embodied in Christ. These apostates renounced the whole Gospel system of salvation—Jesus alone sets one free (**John 14:6**).

John, one of the twelve, sets this "full knowledge of the truth" in his Gospel as he seeks to call attention to the uniqueness of Jesus as the Savior of the world. He records a conversation of Jesus in which Jesus explains His teaching about Himself, which explains this "full knowledge of the truth" that the author of Hebrews alludes to. Jesus makes clear to the Jews who believe on Him that "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (**John 8:31-32**). What is this "truth" that will set one free? It is Jesus! Listen once more as Jesus explains this statement: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (**8:36**).

What is the "teaching" that Jesus speaks about? Within this context, Jesus states emphatically: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins" (**8:23-24**). Again, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**8:12**). John the Baptist, as reported by John, one of the apostles, also gives testimony to this same teaching that Jesus later asserted:

> The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. [32] He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. [33] The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. [34] For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of

God, for God[c] gives the Spirit without limit. [35] The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. [36] Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him[d] (**3:31-36**).

The warning in **Hebrews 10:26** is addressed to Jewish Christians who were tempted to reject Jesus as the Messiah and return to Judaism, which involved the Temple with its animal sacrifices. These same Jews had earlier understood the Gospel message—"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). By returning to Judaism, these individuals were trampling the Son of God and treating the blood of Christ as an unholy thing. The author of Hebrews expresses Himself this way in a question: "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace (**Hebrews 10:29**)? When one rejects Jesus, there is no further remission.

If one wishes to understand the warning in **Hebrews 10:26-31**, one must consider the counterpart found in **10:19-25**. In this section, the author presents the proper response to the sacrifice of Jesus as Lord. In this section, the writer calls attention to (1) "Let us draw near to God" [**10:22**], (2) "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess" [**10:23**], and (3) Let us not give up meeting together" [**10:25**]. If one turns his or her back upon the finished work of Christ, one cannot approach the Throne of Grace; it is only through the "blood of Jesus" that one can approach this Throne (**10:19**). Unlike the Temple veil that separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place, Jesus has launched "a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body" (**10:20**). Jesus is now the "great high priest over the house of God" (**10:21**). This is the Good News of God that Jesus announced during His ministry. Christians can now, through Jesus, approach God with "boldness" (KJV) [παρρησία, parrhsia, "openness," "frankness," "confidence," "assurance"]; this is the privilege of the Gospel of God that all believers share.

The "blood of Jesus" took away all causes of distance between God and believers. The "blood of Jesus" made atonement for sins; the "blood of Jesus" removed the curse of the Law; the "blood of Jesus" removed the partition wall that separated both Jew and Gentile. The "blood of Jesus" removed all the prohibitions of approaching God with "boldness." Those who apostatized, as reported in **10:26**, rejected Jesus and His blood atonement. The death of Jesus signaled the death of the old way. Matthew reports: "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (**Matthew 27:51**). This tearing of the veil in the Temple signified that by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ that one now has full entrance into the Most Holy Place, God's Throne of Grace. It is only through faith in Christ that one finds boldness, or confidence, to draw near to God.

The second admonition in this triad is: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (**Hebrews 10:24**). There is to be a constant perseverance on the part of the believer in his or her reaching out to others. When Christians meet together, this should be a time in which believers are to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (**10:24**). A sharing of the full knowledge of

Christ and His sacrifice will spur one toward faithfulness in love and works. The writer of Hebrews had just called attention to the fact that the blood of Jesus is the answer to one's redemption (**9:12**). Again, he calls attention to the truth that there is power in the blood of Jesus. This blood makes one complete. The blood of Christ opens the way to heaven, and it is the blood of Christ that opens the grave. When Jesus took the third cup in the Passover, He identified this Cup of Blessing as representative of His blood: "This is my blood of the[b] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**).

The third caution in this trilogy is: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (**10:25**). Christians cannot mature in isolation from other Christians. Failure to meet together with the saints resulted in apostasy. One's adherence to this trilogy of admonitions will prevent one from going back into Judaism. This is the sin of apostasy. The Hebrew believers were told not to "forsake" (ἐγκαταλείτω, egkataleipw, "desert," "abandon") the gathering of themselves with the saints. This Greek word is a very strong and emphatic word. Apparently some were abandoning the assembly in the face of danger. The context appears to deal with one's complete and absolute rejection of one's public faithfulness to Christianity. This desertion is what Paul warns against. After having set forth one's proper response to God's grace *in* and *through* Jesus, this inspired writer issues his warning: " If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, [27] but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (**10:26-27**).

As stated earlier, if one discards the "knowledge of truth" concerning Jesus and His sacrifice, then God's judgment falls upon this individual. This sin is the sin of apostasy; it is not sin in general, but it is the sin of apostasy from the faith and profession of the truth concerning Jesus—a truth once known and now rejected. This particular sin of apostasy discussed by the author of Hebrews represents a deviation from what these believers had heard from the beginning. John, in his first Epistle, writes of this same scenario concerning those who deny the Father and the Son:

> [18] Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. [19] They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. [20] But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.[a] [21] I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. [22] Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. [24] See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. [25] And this is what he promised us—even eternal life. [26] I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. [27] As for you, the anointing you received from him

> remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him (**1 John 2:19-26**).

This particular truth that John writes about concerns the identity of the Son of God. If one rejects Jesus, one rejects the Father who sent Him. Some were dismissing Jesus and returning to Judaism. Some were even renouncing that Jesus had come in the flesh. For example, John writes with penetrating conciseness:

> Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (**4:1-3**).

Many believers were denying the confession that Peter made many years earlier in response to Jesus question about His identity: ""You are the Christ,[a] the Son of the living God" (**Matthew 16:16**). At Christ's baptism, God gave His testimony concerning the identity of Jesus. Matthew writes: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:16**). Toward the end of Jesus' public ministry, God, on the Mount of Transfiguration, identifies Jesus once more. Matthew reports this episode with God's reaction to Peter's request: "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (**17:5**). Even in His final moments upon the Cross, a centurion and those with him cried out: "Surely he was the Son[c] of God!" (**27:54**). Apparently, some of these Jewish Christians were on the verge of reverting back to Judaism—a turnaround that denied that Jesus was the Son of God. The author of Hebrews warns:

> We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. [2] For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, [3] how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. [4] God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (**Hebrews 2:1-4**).

Because of persecution against Christians, many were turning back to the old dispensation, which dispensation was about to end (**Hebrew 10:25**; **1 Peter 4:7**; **Matthew 24**; **Luke 21**; **Mark 13**; **Book of Revelation**). Both John and the inspired writer of Hebrews call attention to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70—"This is the last hour" (**1John 2:18**) and "as you see the Day approaching (**Hebrews 10:25**). Remember, the sin of apostasy is not regular sin in general (**1 John 2:1-2**). If one does not remain in apostasy and repents of this particular sin, one can still find forgiveness. One cannot and will not find forgiveness if one continues in the denial of Jesus'

function as High Priest and His Atonement (**Hebrews 9:11-15**). In John's short Epistle, he draws attention to sin and forgiveness. Pay attention to John as he captures the very essence of Christianity:

> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for[b] the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:1-2**).

When one denies Jesus as the "atoning sacrifice for our sins," there is no forgiveness. For one to retrograde back into Judaism would be to go back into darkness. Some, apparently, were relapsing into Temple worship with its rituals from which they had been converted. In the Book of Hebrews, the author exalts Christ's sacrifice. With the sacrifice of Christ, the constant sacrifices of the Old Testament are no longer needed. Why? The answer lies in the one sacrifice that granted the forgiveness of sin—namely, Jesus (**Hebrews 10:11-18**). Jesus is the only answer to the sin problem. The whole administration of Christ had to do with abiding realities, not with the passing shadows portrayed in the Old Testament (**9:1-14**).

Nothing can save civilization, but the incoming rule of the unseen and eternal Kingdom of God, which is about Jesus Christ (**2 Timothy 2:8**). The Gospel of Jesus offers redemption (**Colossians 1:14**). The Gospel is a word from the beyond for the predicament of lost men and women—a word of sovereign grace. The Gospel is the Word of God coming from eternity into time (**John 1:1-4**; **Hebrews 1:1-2**). The author of Hebrews warns against the sin of unbelief, unbelief concerning Jesus as the Way to God. Listen to the writer of Hebrews as he issues his caveat, or warning:

> 7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, 9 where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. 10 That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' 11 So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"[a] 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. 15 As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion"[b] (**Hebrews 3:7-15**).

Forgiveness through Jesus is what the Gospel (Good News) is about—justification by faith *in* and *through* Jesus. If one accepts the belief that sin in general cannot be forgiven, this belief system of God's failure to forgive deliberate sin denies the whole of the New Testament teaching about forgiveness. One's reading of the Book of Revelation reveals the gift of repentance from God. The letters to the

seven churches in Asia—not all the churches in Asia Minor—reveal the forgiveness of God in spite of the so-called willful sins of Christians in the various congregations.

CONCLUSION

If one forsakes, or discards, Jesus as God's Way of salvation, there is no hope for this person. If one continues in the sin of apostasy, there is no hopefulness for eternal life. The author of Hebrews is addressing the frame of mind that denies Jesus' sacrifice. This sin is the sin of utter abandonment of God's Anointed One—the One whom God made both Lord and Christ. As stated above, the present tense of the participle (ἁμαρτανόντων, Jamartanontwn, "sin" KJV or "keep on sinning" NIV) conveys the idea that the sin involved is not a single act or backsliding in general, but a continuing negative response toward Christ. In other words, this "sin" is the sin of apostasy, that is, the total dismissal of Jesus. Again, the author is not dealing with the weak backslider or the penitent offender. When one rejects God's Way of forgiveness by abandoning the One He gave to take away the sins of the world, one insults God's Spirit of Grace; thus, this makes pardon impossible. If one rejects Christ's sacrifice, there is no other offering that can avail and atone for one's sin of rebellion.

Even with the sin of apostasy, there is forgiveness if one ceases to remain in that denial of Jesus as God's final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. If one is a backslider, God still holds out to the penitent His forgiveness. The seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor demonstrates God's forgiveness when repentance is exhibited. For instance, Jesus, after issuing some praise for the church at Ephesus, issues a strong warning against their having left their "first love" (**Revelation 2:4**). Even though they sinned in their actions, Jesus offered a way of reinstatement through repentance: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (**2:5**). The third letter addresses Christians in Pergamum (**2:12-17**). Some believers were involved in sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. In spite of these sins, God did not just wipe them off, so to speak. He warned: "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (**2:16**). The church at Thyatira was also guilty of the same sins, but she was unwilling to repent (**2:21**). Christ gave her time to change her behavior, but to no avail.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew preserves one of Christ's parables about forgiveness—The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (**Matthew 18:21-35**). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches His disciples about prayer. In this prayer He also focuses upon the need to forgive since God forgives (**6:5-14**). The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is another example of forgiveness (**Luke 18:9-14**). Forgiveness is extended to anyone who repents. Even the scenario in **Hebrews 10:26** is not irreversible if one repents. The sin of apostasy in **10:26** is the sin of continuing in one's rejection of Jesus as the atonement for the salvation of Adam's race. John, as he closes his Apocalypse, writes with urgency in his voice: "[17] The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life (**Revelation 22:17**).

In conclusion, one needs to reflect upon the resurrection and forgiveness of sins in and through Jesus. When the apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin (**Acts 5:27**),

the apostles, in response to questions asked by the ruling body, addressed the benefits of the resurrection in these words: "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel" (**Acts 5:31**). For the believer, the resurrection is the seal of God's acceptance of the sacrifice Jesus made for sin. Forgiveness of sins is not difficult to receive; it is simply a matter of faith in Jesus. Peter says, "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**Acts 10:43**). The act of believing involves repentance and baptism on the part of the one who wishes to possess eternal life.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, in response to the crowds questioning him and the other apostles about what to do to be saved, responded by asserting, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 2:38**). If you wish to experience "forgiveness full and free," you must repent of your sins. Repentance is more that just regret over your past actions; repentance involves a total change of heart, mind, and will concerning sin. Repentance means that you are no longer a servant of sin, but rather a servant of righteousness. The Scriptures assert, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (**Proverbs 28:13**). John also proclaims the same thing: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (**1 John 1:9**). Forgiveness is available to anyone who believes in Jesus and repents of his/her sins. Once you have repented of your sins, then you need to respond to baptism that is in the name of Jesus—"repent and be baptized," announced Peter.

There is only one Person in the universe who can set you free from sin, and that One is none other than Jesus Christ our Lord. "Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (**Acts 10:43**), said Peter to Cornelius and his household. Paul expresses it this way: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (**Ephesians 1:7**). Here it is—forgiveness full and free. Do you want forgiveness in your life? You would do well to listen to Peter as he speaks about the forgiveness of sins to Cornelius: "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**Acts 10:42-43**).

Paul, in Pisidian Antioch, calls attention to the "good news" about forgiveness (**Acts 13:32**). He also calls attention to the Holy Scriptures to give validity to his conclusions: "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm" (**Acts 13:32-33**). Again Paul declares, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses" (**Acts 13:38-39**). In conclusion, I remind each of you that if you wish to possess "forgiveness full and free," the condition is: a total repentance of sin and a total reliance on Christ. Do you want eternal life? If so, remember the words of the Master: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. [20] Here I am! I

stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (**Revelation 3:19-20**).

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[1] *The Holy Bible : King James Version.*, Heb 10:26. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995.

[2] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

c Greek *he*

d Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 30.

b Some manuscripts *the new*

a Some manuscripts *and you know all things*

a Or *Messiah*; also in verse 20

c Or *a son*

b Or *He is the one who turns aside God~s wrath, taking away our sins, and not only ours but also*

a Psalm 95:7-11

b Psalm 95:7,8

Obey Them That Have the Rule Over You?

IMPORTANCE NOTICE:

If you wish to read the Greek and Hebrew characters employed in this essay, you must download (free) the Greek and Hebrew fonts listed on my home page.

Thrust statement: **Elders are to lead, not dictate.**

Scripture reading: **Hebrews 13:17**.

INTRODUCTION

> Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (**Hebrews 13:17**).[1]

This essay seeks to explore the role of leaders within the Christian community of the Churches of Christ. In this investigation, the objective is to analyze the function of power seized by many leaders/elders/preachers/ editors within the Churches of Christ and also to look into the key Scriptures cited by the select few for their justification of dictatorial powers. There is a positive side of leadership as well as a negative side. This paper seeks to look at both sides from a biblical perspective. On the downbeat trait, the person in charge is dictatorial; on the upbeat quality, the guide is a model to be imitated in his/her daily walk with God. On the negative side, the leader is viewed as ruler, boss, director, executive, manager, chief, and master. However, on the positive side, the leader is viewed as guide, advisor, beacon, counselor, teacher, lighthouse, and guidepost.

LEADERSHIP IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Dictatorial Leadership

The question that confronts many sincere Christians is: Is biblical submission blind obedience to whatever the leaders believe the Bible teaches? Or does biblical surrender to the leaders negate allegiance to Christ in every facet of one's life? Can the leaders stand in judgment for another's actions? Or does each person give an account to God for his/her own dealings? Are there any infallible interpreters in the Churches of Christ? These are questions that everyone must deal with in his/her own life. Is your faith in the leaders? Or is your faith in God? Which? Are leaders infallible interpreters of God's Word? Are Christians responsible to God for their actions? Are Christians to blindly follow whatever the leaders tell them to do or believe?

Has God authorized high-ranking individuals to occupy a tyrannical position within the Christian community? It is not uncommon for elders, within the Churches of Christ, to hire or dismiss preachers without the consent of the congregation. Once they make the decision, then that judgment is final—no recourse, case closed. Can elders appoint other elders without the consent of the congregation? This scenario happened recently in a congregation in Birmingham, AL. As a result of high-handedness, the body of Christ split. Has God endorsed a select few to exercise lordship over the consciences of other believers? Are believers to unscrew their heads and let a certain group of men behave as a board of directors? When the board of administrators interprets Scripture, should one accept their views as *ex cathedra*? Is it sinful for one to disagree with the chosen shepherds and still remain within the fellowship of God's people, that is to say, the local congregation? Does God require blind conformity? Is one to be fully

persuaded according to the thinking of the elders/preachers/evangelist, regardless as to what they teach? Or should Christians exercise some judgment in keeping with their own minds? Do the Scriptures teach a sort of sightless submission?[2]

The positive aspects of leadership promote responsible direction in order to encourage others to put forward a life dedicated to holy living. There is a need for older men to give guidance in the way of devoutness (see **Hebrews 13:1-17**). Leaders need to encourage Christians through their trials and tribulations. The church needs godly men to train other Christians to become soldiers for Jesus Christ in the conversion of the world.

Congregational Leadership

This composition is not written to castigate holy men in their roles as servants of Christ nor is this essay written to deny that congregations need leadership. Rather this paper is concerned with "power religion." Power religion is the same thing as exercising lordship over God's children. Lording it over people is spiritual abuse. Peter warns leaders not to engage in such high-handed tactics:

> To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording (katakurieuvonte", *katakurieuontes*) it over those entrusted to you, but being examples (tuvpoi, *tupoi*) to the flock (**1 Peter 5:1-3**).

Peter wants the elders to be models or patterns to the flock, not individuals who lord it over the ones entrusted to them. Since there is a trend among some leaders that Christians are to give blind obedience to whatever they teach, then this issue of the proper role of leadership must be dealt with. Some leaders assume the role of Pope in their relationship to the people. It is wrong for leaders to bind their interpretations upon other Christians.[3] The philosophy of "individual non-responsibility" advanced by many leaders is unbiblical. Leaders are not infallible interpreters. Every person should search the Scriptures for himself/herself and draw his/her own conclusions based upon the context (See **Romans 14:1—15:7**).

Paul sets an example of this kind of reasoning in his letter to the Christians at Rome and Corinth. There were many differences over doctrinal matters within the congregation at Rome. Some of the believers were correct in their interpretation of the issues discussed in **Romans 14** and some were wrong. But both were wrong when they tried to impose their views upon other believers. Thus, Paul dealt with diversity of opinions this way:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**Romans 14:1-4**).

Paul did not say that the shepherds were to enforce the correct interpretation dealing with "disputable matters." The person with deficiency in understanding is still acceptable to God. Paul says "no" to judging: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (**14:4**). But is that all Paul says about this issue of unity in diversity? Again, the answer is "no." Listen once more to Paul as he speaks of the standing of individuals with imperfection in their knowledge: "To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**14:4**). Some of the Christians wanted to force their own views in these matters of differences, but again Paul says, "no": "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (**Romans 14:5**). He concludes his discussion about diversity this way: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**15:7**). Has God accepted you with imperfection in your life? Has God accepted you with imperfection in your understanding? If so, then Paul says that believers should "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Not only did Paul deal with unity in diversity with the church at Rome, but he also had to address this issue of how Christians should react when some defect in knowledge is quite apparent to the know-it-alls. He begins his treatise on the sacrificing of foods to idols: "Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge" (**1 Corinthians 8:1**). In other words, it is true that some understood the issues very clearly while others did not comprehend. Paul admits this up front. But he does not drop the ball with that statement. He goes on to say: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (**8:1**). It is not uncommon for Christians who think they know everything to manifest an attitude of aloofness toward those whose knowledge does not measure up to theirs. Paul goes right to the heart of this problem: "Knowledge puffs up." For Paul, if one loves others in spite of differences, then, this condescension is the outcome of love—"love builds up."

Paul nips this know-it-all-attitude in the bud. He writes: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (**8:2**). Christians are in a state of growth. But Paul does not want Corinthians to make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion. What does matter is the state of the heart. Again, Paul points out that that

which is acceptable to God is love for God: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (**8:2**). One may be deficient in knowledge but, at the same time, if one loves God, then, this individual is the one to whom God extends His love.[4]

If there were elders in the congregation at Corinth, they were not advised to take a negative action against the weak but rather to love them. Paul later wrote Titus on the procedures to follow if a person became divisive: "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (**Titus 3:10-11**). This warning would apply to any of God's children—leaders or lay people. If one is not willing to follow the counsel of Paul to the Romans and the Corinthians, then Paul says that one should have nothing to do with the disruptive person—none are excluded, which includes elders, preachers, and editors of Christian journals. The so-called ruling class does not frequently heed this warning; they themselves become very troublesome when they do not get their way. They themselves are frequently divisive. Unseeing submission on the part of the congregation discourages personal accountability to God; this sightless resignation is not a mark of true Christian maturity. Raymond Brown is perfectly right when he insists, "The Christian is answerable to Christ alone."[5]

CONTROVERSY AND MISUNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

Much of the controversy and misunderstanding concerning the proper role leaders play within the local body of believers revolves around an interpretation of **Hebrews 13:17**: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority." Many well-meaning leaders to substantiate their dictatorial leadership with the Churches of Christ, as well as of many other Christian ecclesiastical structures, quote this passage. Many godly men cite this Scripture with almost literal crudeness. Certain Scriptures, on first reading, appear to uphold the position many leaders advance within the local congregation. But before one offers an interpretation, one should consult the context. One goal of any interpreter should be to ascertain what the original writer sought to communicate through his use of words.

The arguments that are usually advanced to maintain lordship over the congregation are so fragile that one is reluctant to let too much credence rest upon them. Nevertheless, because of current arguments advanced by a few, this subject of authority exercised by a small number of leaders must be dealt with. Part of the problem today is that the traditions of the church sometimes make it difficult, is not impossible, to read the Bible without "glasses." Truth is too often the projection of the particular views and interests of the powerful. The powerful, often times, have difficulty in hearing God accurately. The

"faith of the fathers" becomes the watchword of orthodoxy. Without intending to, "we bring our theological heritage, our ecclesiastical traditions, our cultural norms, or our existential concerns to the Epistles as we read them."[6] The words of Jesus should ring loud and clear: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (**Revelation 3:6**).[7]

In seeking an answer to the phrase, "Obey them that have the rule over you" (**Hebrews 13:17**, KJV),[8] every interpreter must initially pursue the meaning intended for the original audience. Too often Christians find things in biblical narratives that are not really there (eisegesis); they read *into* the Bible their own notions rather than read *out of* (exegesis) the Bible what God wants them to know. Christians should not be "monkey-see-monkey-do" readers of Holy Scripture. God's words are to be found in the intent of His Revelation, not man's interpretation of His Word.

Since words operate within a context and receive meaning from that context, then an exegete (interpreter) must recognize that words can change from situation to situation. Words do not automatically have meaning; they receive meaning from their author. To make the text say something that the author did not propose is to abuse the text. The message of the passage cannot be properly interpreted in isolation from the historical context. As a result of misreading the text, it is not uncommon for leaders to labor under the impression that God has given them authority over other Christians. Their voices are equated with the Word of God. Their interpretations are identified with Scripture. No one is allowed to be "fully convinced in his own mind" (**Romans 14:5**). But the evidence does not support the traditional attitude and position maintained by many elders. It is imperative that Christians learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to them through the years.

Ultimatums of Conformity Issued

By Many Religious Leaders

It is not exceptional for leaders (elders and preachers) to issue an ultimatum to other Christians who do not concur with their particular brand of orthodoxy to either shape up or ship out. The rule of thumb is: one must submit, never question. One is not allowed to disagree with the so-called leadership and still remain within the fellowship of the local community. In order to justify such ungodly behavior by the leaders, the nonconformist (one that thinks for himself/herself) is often referred to as "not sound in the faith."

This mind-set is especially true within the various factions that exist within the Churches of Christ (at least twenty-five or more divisions). One's acceptability depends on the position that one maintains concerning the following issues: one's understandings about

divorce and remarriage, instrumental music in the so-called worship service, the use of the Sunday school versus the non-Sunday school position, individual communion cups versus the one-cup practice, the Scripturalness of Bible colleges, the support of orphan homes, views on the return of Christ (premillennial), handclapping in the assembly, solo singing in the assembly, and so on. Christians are not allowed freedom to decide for themselves; the beliefs espoused by certain individuals must coincide with partisan leadership.

The subject of divorce and remarriage has wrought havoc within the body of Christ. If one divorces without the approval of leadership, then warnings are issued concerning their marital status. In other words, the eldership can issue an ultimatum—divorce and remain celibate or face dire consequences—ostracism. The leadership determines whether one should remain single, or if remarried, whether one can remain married. Whatever leadership decides, the people must obey without question. For one not to obey the elders is tantamount to not obeying God. No one is allowed to disagree with the "chosen few" without incurring the wrath of God, at least according to the leaders. The dictatorial powers are not limited just to this one issue—divorce and remarriage—but it can be applied to any position that the leadership decides upon.

Sightless Conformity Demanded

By Some Leaders

A host of Christian leaders today teach sightless conformity to their biblical interpretations. The kind of concord demanded by many church leaders—elders, preachers, and editors of religious journals—is not the same intent of the author of Hebrews. many church leaders today—not all—have the concept of compliance that demands conformity and resignation to party orthodoxy. The battle cry is: submit or be kicked out of the synagogue. This attitude is the same mindset of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. As a result of the misuse of the Greek text, recent scholarship has focused on this issue of "obey" and its semantic[9] meaning. According to Owen L. Crouch, the "verb means 'persuade.' When you persuade yourself you obey. . . . They are not dictators over your spirits but are 'leaders' for your lives."[10] Another scholar, Philip Hughes, is perfectly right when he insists: "The authority our author is commending must not be confused with authoritarianism."[11] It is in this same vein that Leon Morris draws attention to the fact that "authority" is not a part of the Greek text. For instance, he writes:

> The readers are to be obedient to their leaders. In v. 7 the leaders were men who had died. Here, however, those alive and currently in places of authority are meant (At the same time we should perhaps notice that there is nothing in the Gr. to correspond to NIV's 'their authority').[12]

Thus, Schuyler English, too, explains: "It is self-evident, or should be, that such obedience will not be in the form of blind and unqualified compliance with the whims of self-appointed authority."[13] Why did the author of **Hebrews** write **verses 7** and **17** in **chapter 13**? Just a casual glance of the Book as a whole seems to convey the author's appeal to the believers who had previously responded to the good news of God not to return to legalism, that is, Judaism. The new covenant demands, even as the old covenant, high moral standards, but at the same time, the new covenant does not involve Mosaic rituals, holy days, and formalities. In other words, the new covenant with God through Jesus Christ is internal, not external ritualism of animal sacrifices. He draws attention to the crucifixion of Jesus, but, in doing this, he cautions them about the possibility of crucifying the Son of God afresh by returning to Judaism.

He wants the Hebrews to continue to trust in Jesus as God's atonement for the sins of humanity. Not only does he want these believers to turn to Him for salvation, but he also wants them to lay aside every sin that causes one to stumble so easily. This faithfulness to Jesus is what **verses 7** and **17** are all about in **chapter 13** of **Hebrews**. Listen once more to the author of Hebrews:

> Keep on loving each other as brothers. [2] Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. [3] Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. [4] Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. [5] Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." [6] So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" [7] Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. [8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. [9] Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. [10] We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. [11] The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. [12] And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. [13] Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. [14] For here we do not have an enduring city, but we

are looking for the city that is to come. [15] Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. [16] And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. [17] Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (**Hebrews 13:1-17**).

Letter to Dallas Burdette from Abused Preacher

This author recently received (December 23, 2001) a letter from a brother who has suffered tremendously from abusive power exerted by the powerful. I am withholding this brother's name in order to protect him, as much as possible, from the powers that be. As one reads his letter, one can sympathize with the abuse he has received from individuals who have mistreated him—all in the name of faithfulness to the Word of God. Listen to this brother as he describes his encounter within the Churches of Christ. He writes about his pilgrimage of faith as he left the Baptist movement to work among the Churches of Christ:

> Dear Brother Dallas:
> First, I want to sincerely apologize for my apparent poor demeanor in my E-Mails to you. I ask that you forgive me of this wrong! Permit me to briefly explain that I came amongst the churches of Christ meek, humble, rejoicing & happy. In a matter of a few short months I had been torn to shreds, me & my wife & family. The radical "anti's" looked at every corner for anything of disagreement they could find to beat me with. I endured it for a time, confusedly. Yet, after a while I figured I had to take up for myself & defend myself. This has been a constant fight for me now for over 3 years. As you know, & as you stated in one of your E-Mails, if one does not line up & agree with them on EVERY single point then one is a false teacher & open game. They totally refuse a personal thinker & do everything in their power to gang up & kill him! I'm sure you know exactly what I am talking about. My growing up in a religion that held the Ministry in high esteem & reverence into the Church of Christ who are the total opposite was a tremendous shock, to say the least! This is what led to the writing of my book. I am a child of God that has been beat up on so much that I have so much anger & hostility in my heart for church of Christ people. I am a Preacher walking around with a chip on his shoulder ready at any time to fight, as I have been made to react. I am sorry that I have become this way. It's like if a father or mother literally beats their child it will turn out to beat others as well because that's how they have had to learn to react. I am not the man I use to be

prior to entering the Church of Christ denomination. I don't know if I'll rebound back from it! It appears that the "knee-jerk reaction" I spoke to you about just happens to be me! I ask for your forgiveness in Christ Jesus.
I totally enjoy your writings. You work very hard & I am proud to have them in my library. Thank you so much. Brother Dallas, I want to go to heaven, I want to love the Lord & His people. I want to serve Him & them all the days of my life. Yet, I must somehow work through this bitterness. I ask for your humble prayers on this behalf. Dallas, behind all this bitterness, hatred, evil, & paranoia is a kind-hearted child of Christ who loves Him with all his heart.
My God truly & richly bless you & yours with happiness & long life in His service.

DALLAS BURDETTE VERSUS ELDERSHIP

Membership in Local Congregation

As one reflects back on the KJV rendering of **Hebrews 13:17**, one is confronted with the words: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account." Many Christian leaders read this verse with wooden literalness. Several years ago, this author (Dallas Burdette) sought to place membership with one of the local congregations in Montgomery, AL. This particular fellowship of believers was associated with the Stone/Campbell Movement of the nineteen-century. This group identified itself as a Church of Christ. Once I had made known my desire to place membership and work within this congregation, the elders informed me that they would need to meet with me before they could give their consent. I agreed to this meeting, but they informed me that this would have to be done on a Wednesday evening during the congregation's regular Bible study groups. They refused to come to my home or allow me to meet with them in their homes. This meeting, since it occurred on Wednesday evening, only lasted for about thirty minutes.

I finally agreed to meet with this board of directors—commonly called eldership—to discuss my becoming a member of this local congregation. After going to the office of the pulpit minister, we all set around a conference table. Then, the meeting began like this: "We understand that you have a problem with obeying them that have the rule over you." Ultimately, they wanted to exercise mind control over me. I was informed that they would accept me on certain conditions. The conditions were: (1) You cannot invite members of this congregation into your home if you have certain individuals visiting you, namely, Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett; and (2) You can never give any religious journal or book to any member of this congregation without our approval.

I found this extremely interesting, especially the one about not giving books to anyone without the permission of the "ruling elders." One of the "ruling elders" owned one of the largest Christian bookstores in the South. He could sell the books, but I could not give them away without his permission. This group wanted to place a "gag order" on my writings or the writings of other men. This group of elders practiced mind control, which is totally unbiblical. These leaders sought to coerce me into accepting their views as infallible, even though some later changed their views on the divorce and remarriage issues that they adamantly argued against me at the time. My views, at the time, were also a bone of contention with these men. Later (several years later), one of the elders who fought my membership in the congregation changed his views concerning the divorce and remarriage controversy. He requested that I write a paper on this subject, which I did.[14]

Mind Control Sought By Elders

Another encounter occurred several years earlier than the aforementioned encounter with the board of directors. In this congregation, I expressed some views, while teaching a Bible class, on the marriage and divorce debate that did not coincide with the "ruling class." One of the elders came to me and informed me: "You are never to tell anyone anything in this congregation that disagrees with what the elders have said." Once more, one is confronted with the "obey them that have the rule over you." This is the same congregation that called in a preacher from Atlanta, GA to get the congregation back on track—in spite of the fact that many members objected. After his arrival, he and the elders, one evening, raided the library and confiscated all of the books that I had donated to the Church, which had been previously approved by the same elders. These books were then placed under lock-and-key. The members were not allowed to read them. One of the deacons found out that I picked up my books, but he was never told that, prior to my asking for my books back, the leadership impounded the books to protect its members. Again, one witnesses the cult mentality of mind control on the part of leadership.[15]

DALLAS BURDETTE VERSUS CHRISTIANITY UNIVERSITY

Essays Banned

Mind control is the major key to keeping its membership under control. One of the major Christian universities in Montgomery, AL also plays the identical mind control game that elders, preachers, and editors of religious journal exercise—agree or face excommunication or refusal to allow one on the faculty. The President of this particular university issued an executive order that my essays could no longer be required reading by the professors. Prior to this executive order, many of my essays were required reading. After my papers were placed on the prohibited list, I was not even allowed to photocopy papers—not even essays written by others—for the professors. This same Christian

refused to allow me on the faculty because I would not write a paper condemning instrumental music.[16] Is this brother sincere? I suspect that he is. He, like so many of us, allows traditions to mold one's thinking. These leaders place themselves, not self-consciously, on a level with God. For one to disagree with leadership, then this is the same as disagreeing with God.

Letter from Bill Smith (An Elder)

In spite of the Matthean account of Jesus' rebuke of superiority among the disciples, nevertheless, Christians still cite **Hebrews 13:7**, **17**, and **24** to substantiate dictatorial, magisterial, authoritarian, totalitarian, and domineering obedience in the absolute. One is still confronted by the demand of some leaders (elders, preachers, and editors of religious journals) to demand blind obedience to group leaders. Having said this, this statement is not a blanket castigation of all religious leaders. This author (Dallas Burdette) received an email (December 25, 2001) from an elder (Bill Smith, Jr.), who is one of the leaders in a congregation in Louisiana. He writes:

> Dallas, as you do your paper on "authority" and Hebrews 13:17, you can quote this elder as saying no mere human has authority over another Christian. As an elder, I have inordinate influence, but I have no raw authority to command anyone! Most men who want to argue authority do so because they have little or no influence among God's people that allows them to lead. Therefore, they want to command. Of course, they do consider themselves to be benefactors for the peoples good, don't they? This authority thing in my opinion is another of those hangovers from Catholicism. It grieves me that men want to rule rather than serve. This after Jesus made it so clear that his disciple were not to function as the world's rulers. Do a good job on your paper. Our fellowship really needs to reinvestigate Christian leadership.[17]

HEBREWS 13:17 EMPLOYED BY MANY LEADERS

TO ENFORCE CONFORMITY TO ORTHODOXY

OF ITS PARTICULAR FACTION

As stated above, the Scripture that is cited to uphold the traditional position of the authority of elders (leadership) within the Churches of Christ is **Hebrews 13:17**. Many Christians read this Scripture and automatically identify this passage as authority for insisting that the elders are to be obeyed *in toto* (completely, fully, entirely, utterly). When one reads this verse without spectacles, one is immediately confronted with the awareness that this Scripture does not mention the word *elders*. In fact, the word that the Hebrews author employs is the word *leaders* (ηΣγουμεψνοϊ, &hgoumenois, "to lead,"

"leading ones"). Even though leaders may include elders, nevertheless, this text does not indicate who the leaders were.

When one interprets **Hebrews 13:17** to teach that Christians must blindly "obey the elders," then this kind of reading reads too much into the words of this text. Within many segments of the Restoration Movement, this Scripture has lead to the crystallization of error concerning the role of leaders within the body of Christ. Raymond Brown draws attention to the negative interpretation foisted upon this passage:

> The writer is not inculcating blind, unthinking obedience to everything a Christian teacher says, otherwise there would be little point in issuing the warning he has just given about 'diverse and strange' doctrines. In the New Testament there is clear recognition that discernment is obviously necessary and also that obedience to the revealed word of God is essential. [18]

King James Version: Creation of Much Confusion

Some of the confusion exists as a result of the King James Version. The word and phrase that contribute to the confusion are: "obey," and "rule over you." The English word *obey* is the translation of πειψθω (peiqw), and the words *rule over you* originate from the Greek word ηΣγουψμενö (&goumenos). This essay will explore the use of these two Greek words in order to ascertain the true intent of the author. It appears, so it seems to this author (Dallas Burdette), that the words *obey* (even though a correct translation) and *rule over you* are too strong and, thus, do not convey accurately the nuance intended by the author. The traditional emphasis upon the word *obey* contradicts other plain teachings as expounded by Jesus to His disciples. Also, the English phrase "rule over you" does not carry the sense contemplated by the originator of this Epistle.

The English translation seems to infer a hierarchy within the church, that is to say, a pyramid structure with laity at the bottom and various levels of leadership going to the top of the pyramid. Does the Greek text substantiate this kind of interpretation upon πειψθω (peiqw, "persuade") and ηςγεψομαι, (&hgeomai, "to lead)? As stated above, Matthew records a conversation between Jesus and His disciples about leadership. The disciples were arguing about positions of power. To this Jesus responds by saying:

> [25] Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. [26] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever wants to be first must be your

slave— [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:25-28**).

The word *rulers* is from the Greek word α[ρχοντë (archontes, which is from α[ρχων, arcwn, "ruler" or "chief"). Then the words "lord it over" are from the Greek word κατακυριευψουσιν (katakurieusousin, which is from κατακυριευψω, katakurieuw, "to exercise dominion over"). And finally, the words "exercise authority over" are from the Greek word κατεξουσιαψζουσιν (katexousizousin, which is from κατεξουσιαψζω, katexousiazw, "to exercise authority over"). These words employed by Jesus in His conversation stands in stark contrast to what the author of Hebrews is reputed to have written. The author of Hebrews did not use α[ρχων, arcwn, "ruler" or "chief," or κατακυριευψω, katakurieuw, "to exercise dominion over," but rather he uses the word ηΣγεψομαι (&geomai, "to lead"). The Greek text in **Hebrews 13:17** does not substantiate the prevailing error ("rule over you") advanced by many elders and preachers within the Churches of Christ. In fact, the general interpretation contradicts what Jesus says in **Matthew 20:25-28**.

Before advancing into an analysis of **Hebrews 13:17**, one's attention is called to another Scripture that is relied upon to uphold the so-called "authority" of the elders. Paul's statement in **1 Timothy 5:17** is also utilized by many sincere Christians to maintain the status quo of the Churches of Christ. Paul writes: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (KJV). The NIV translates: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." The Greek word προεστω'τë (proestwtes, which is from προι;στημι, proisthmi, "to manage," "to direct"). *The Message* translation translates this way: "Give a bonus to leaders who do a good job, especially the ones who work hard at preaching and teaching."[19]

King James and the Divine Right of Kings

The divine right of Kings, as maintained by King James, rings loud and clear in the translation of Holy Scripture.[20] King James wanted his subjects to "obey" him and his appointed bishops. It appears that the KJV has not seized upon the shade of meaning intended by Paul. The Greek word proisthmi may be translated as "direct" or "manage," which communicates the idea of "to lead" or "to care for," not "to rule." The context of **First Timothy** does not exhibit the concept of the ruler and the ruled. This word will be dealt with more fully later in this essay. It is also worthy of note that Paul in his second epistle to Corinth addresses this very issue of "lording it over" God's children: "Not that we lord it over (κυριευψομεν kurieuomen) your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand

firm" (**2 Corinthians 1:24**). But for the time being, it is necessary to draw attention to a more exhaustive study of the English words *obey*, and *rule over you*.

King James and the Cult of the Bishops

As one peruses the King James' rendering of these Scriptures in Hebrews, it appears, at least it seems this way to this author, to be a deliberate attempt by those who were in power (King James [1603-1625] and his bishops) to strengthen their hold on usurped authority, an authority traced all the way back to Henry the Eighth (1509-1547)—the divine right of Kings. According to the author of Hebrews, the "ones leading you" were not to be tyrannical in their leadership, but they were to assume the role of servants. In other words, it is not "sightless" allegiance that is spoken of in **Hebrews 13:7**, **17**, and **24**, but rather submission to the principles of holiness as exemplified in the lives of the leaders.

Regrettably, the translators of the King James Version did not capture the mood of the Greek text precisely. If the author of Hebrews wished to communicate the proposal of "rulership," he could have employed other words to transmit this impression. As stated earlier, the Greek word for "lord it over" is noticeably not present. The current translation of the KJV translation of **Hebrews 13:7**, **17**, and **24** appears to be the attitude of the translators. It is in this vein that Gustavus Paine cogently captures the essence of the "cult of the bishops" mentality, when he writes: "Given the times and the number of bishops among the learned men, the new Bible was certain to sustain the cult of bishops wherever the chance arose."[21]

TRADITION AND THE INTERPRETATION

OF HEBREWS 13:17

From **Hebrews 13:17**, many leaders find authority for their dictatorial powers. But does this verse uphold the kind of tyranny that is found throughout the Churches of Christ as a whole? Why do leaders advance this erroneous view? There is just one answer—tradition. This section of this essay seeks to analyze the phrase—"rule over you" in its biblical setting in order to help godly leaders come to a more balanced and correct view of their positions as shepherds. As stated above, the KJV renders the Greek word ηΣγουμεψνοϊ Jhgoumenois ("leading ones") as "rule over you." It is significant that the author of Hebrews did not employ the noun εξξουσιψα exousia ("authority"), the noun α[ρχων arcwn ("ruler"), the verb α[ρχω arcw ("rule"), the verb κατακυριευψω katakurieuw ("lord it over"), nor the verb κατεξουσιαψζω katexousiazw ("exercise authority over"). These words are conspicuously absent in **Hebrews 13:17**. The word Jhgoumenois is from the Greek word ηΣγεψομαι jJegeomai, which means "to lead" or "to guide."

Unswerving Allegiance to Leaders

Countless leaders still demand unswerving allegiance to their dictates; on the other hand, scores of the so-called select few are not stressing obedience to the truth of the Gospel; that is to say, Jesus as God's way of salvation. But rather, they are trying to force their understanding of doctrinal issues upon unsuspecting members who are not allowed to think for themselves. Christians are compelled to see everything through the distorted lens of interpretation foisted upon the congregation by its leaders. One almost detects a Jim Jones' type of mentality—absolute control over the lives and minds of God's people. Christian leaders frequently manipulate, unconsciously, the text to support blind obedience to their dictates in order to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. There is an utter suppression of freedom. The demands are total submission of one's conscious and surrender of one's soul. This Lilliputian lunacy flourishes unchecked and is transmitted to the next generation.

There are over twenty-five divisions within the denominational Church of Christ, each claiming to be the "true" church. In each of these various splinter groups, one finds elders or leaders seeking to enforce their brand of orthodoxy upon the members of the local congregation with threat of castigation if they fail "to obey" them that have the "rule over them." No one denies that one should obey the teachings of the leaders concerning ethical behavior and Jesus as God's way of salvation. Elders or leaders in each splinter group want to enforce conformity to their odd interpretation of certain Scriptures that they frequently take out of context.

At the moment, numerous leaders advance the notion that it is sinful to employ musical instruments in praise to God, to use multiple cups in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, to use wine in the Lord's Supper, to break the bread or to pinch the bread, to participate in Sunday school, to have a kitchen in the church building (even though these same groups have toilets in their buildings), to take money out of the common treasure to purchase goods for those that are not Christians, and so on. Now, which board of directors should one obey? Each distinct fellowship has its own presuppositions, and when an individual ceases to conform to the dictates of the rulers, then this member is castigated under the charge that he/she did not "obey them that have the rule over you."

Again, the question is: Are Christians to render "blind" obedience to a board of elders—men who can hire or fire preachers without even consulting the members. Leaders frequently control the finances of the church without any input from its members. It is not uncommon for leaders to exercise an iron fist in its policies. Is this what the author of Hebrews is referring to? Or, is he referring to obedience in reference to clinging to Christ and to holy living? An analysis of the words employed by the author will help to bring one into the

consciousness and intention of the writer. As one seeks to understand **Hebrews 13:17**, one must be conscious that words convey many things to different people as they come to the text.

VARIOUS NUANCES OF THE GREEK WORDS TRANSLATED BY THE KJV AS "OBEY" AND "RULE OVER YOU"

In seeking the intent of the author of the Hebrews writer, one must deliberate upon the function or functions of the Greek words employed by the ultimate author of Holy Scripture, namely the Holy Spirit. Several modern scholars have followed this trend of "authority" as advanced by the King James' scholars. Even the NIV employs the word *authority* in its translation of this verse: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (**Hebrews 13:17**). Translators assume, to some extent, the role of an exegete. Translators are often influenced by other translations when they set forth another translation. A few years ago, this author discussed this presupposition of authority in **Hebrews 13:17** with a translator. After looking at the Greek text together, he admitted that he had not looked at the Greek text very closely. He then informed me that his translation of Hebrews stems from other versions.

Leaders seldom ask what this text means; the interpretation of this passage has become normative and is passed on to other Christians as authoritative. It is difficult for believers to hear God accurately because of traditions. A part of the dilemma that the church faces today is an accurate rendering of the Greek text. Before one can draw an accurate reading of this text, one must also consult the Greek text in order to discover the words employed by the author(s) so that one may draw conclusions that are in harmony with the Word of God as a whole. To begin with, the English word *obey* is from the Greek word πειψθω (peiqw, "to persuade," "to have confidence"). The next English phrase is "rule over you," but the Greek word is ηΣγεψομαι (&geomai, "to lead"). The author of Hebrews actually uses the participle (ηΣγουμεψνοϊ, &hgoumenois, "leading ones"), which simply means the ones leading you. And the third word is the English word *submit*, which is from the Greek word υΣπειψκω (&upeikw, "submit").

The problem of confusion over the role that leaders play within the Christian community lies, to some extent, within the translation of the KJV. But this puzzlement is not limited just to the KJV. In fact, as stated above, other translations also contribute to the misunderstanding. The NIV for instance, translates the Greek word peiqw as "obey." But, on the other hand, the NIV translates the Greek word &geomai as "leaders," instead of "rule over you." Yet, after translating &geomai as leaders, then they add the word "authority." One can quickly see how the reader can draw unfounded conclusions based upon the English translations. So the fault is not necessarily the result of the person who reads, even though one should know that something is wrong with the

English translations since the common translations violate another Scripture (**Matthew 20:25-28**).

One would think that every Christian is eager to obey God. Thus, it seems, at least to this author, that the traditional interpretation is not based on evil motives. But, nevertheless, the end result of this faulty rendering promotes the usurpation of authority over God's people. And, as a result of defective interpretation, one's misguided zeal nullifies the teachings of Jesus against the seizure of power by certain individuals among His people. Even though one may respect Godly men who aspire to leadership, one cannot help but detect difficulties within the current rationalization of one Scripture that cancels out another Scripture. In the investigation of **Hebrews 13:17**, the study of morphology should shed some light upon the dilemma that individuals face in seeking to be true to the Word of God.

MORPHOLOGY:

THE STUDY OF WORD FORMATION

Before one embarks upon the words utilized by the author of **Hebrews 13:17**, one should undertake a study of the formation of words in order to appreciate more fully the analysis of **Hebrews 13:17** that is offered in this study to facilitate the correct application of the words utilized by the author to convey his intended meanings by the particular words he chooses. In order to set the stage for a proper interpretation of **Hebrews 13:17**, this essay seeks to present a brief analysis of the field of morphology (A study of forms that enter into the structure of words in a language.). This kind of study should lay the scene for a more enlightened appreciation for the various words employed by the author of Hebrews, as well as other authors.

Hopefully, this study of morphology will assist one in his/her search for a clearer comprehension of the import that is attached to any particular word. The primary role that morphology plays in the field of exegesis is helpful for a clearer understanding in one's interpretation. What is morphology? In the field of science, morphology describes the study of the form of living organisms. On the other hand, in the field of linguistics, morphology pertains to the study of word formation. Exegesis begins with morphology. In the study of morphology, one is confronted with the words *morpheme* and phoneme.

Morphemes

What is a morpheme? Neal Windham defines a morpheme this way: "The *morpheme* is to a word what the arm is to a body; it is a part of the word, distinguishable from all others by its unique makeup and function."[22] Windham illustrates his definition with the following: "It is of utmost importance that you go well beyond the level of morphological analysis in studying vocabulary."[23] He then takes the

two words *utmost* and *importance* to demonstrate what morphemes are. In "utmost" you have two morphemes—"ut" and "most." Then in "importance" you have three morphemes—"im" and "por" and "tance."

One does not read in morphemes, but morphemes do contribute to the meaning of words. One may have a root morpheme that forms the nucleus of a word, while, at the same time, morphemes may be added to the root. For instance, morphemes may be added to the root word "obey" and may be called prefixes or suffixes. That is to say, the prefixes or suffixes may be called affixes. For example, in the word obey, one can add an "s," or "ed," or "ing" to the word *obey*—obeys, obeyed, or obeying. The affixes are "s," "ed", and "ing." These affixes are called suffixes. On the other hand, affixes placed before the root are prefixes; for example, "re" in require, and "un" in unsaved. And finally, affixes appearing in the middle of words are called infixes.

For a combination of prefixes and suffixes added to a root, look up the word *antidisestablishmentarianism* (*anti dis establishment arian ism*), which means

> The theory (ism) of those who (arian) oppose (anti) the breakdown (dis) of the organization of church and state (establishment). There are three prefixes (anti-, dis, and e [from ek]) and six suffixes (bl [from able], ish, ment, ari, an, and ism) built upon the root sta [from the Greek Ἱστημι (&isthmi, "I stand").[24]

Black also gives one of the most informative statements concerning the distinction between root and stem that one can read. He goes right to the very core of the difference when he writes:

> A root must be carefully distinguished from a stem. A stem is any construction to which an affix can be added. Whereas roots always contain a single morpheme, a stem may consist of a root plus an affix. For example, dress is a single morpheme. In the verb undress, dress is the root to which un—is prefixed. It is also the stem. In undressing, dress is still the root or base, but undress is the stem with the suffix—ing. Thus, all roots are stems, but not all stems are roots. In the word blackbirds, black and bird are roots, while blackbird is the stem to which the suffix—s is attached. Stems that consist of two roots are called compounds.[25]

The Morphological System:

Structure of the Greek Language

To understand the structure of the Greek language, one must visualize the morphological system by which its words are constructed. Since words may be made up of several morphemes, one must have a

procedure for identifying these minimal parts. Some morphemes are referred to as free morphemes because they can form words without being attached to any other form. For instance, the word *dog* is a free morpheme. This word can form a morpheme without being associated to any other morpheme. In the plural (dogs), you have two morphemes: "dog" and "s." Thus, the "s" is a bound morpheme. Bound morphemes do not necessarily define meaning.

To illustrate this statement, consider the word *hit*. "Hit" is a free morpheme; but "hits" contains a bound morpheme ("s"). But what does "hits" mean? Context is the deciding factor. For example, take the sentence, "The car *hits* the mail box," or the sentence, "The singer had many *hits*. In the first sentence, the phoneme ("the minimal unit of speech sound in a given language that distinguishes one utterance from another"[26]) "s" signifies the third person singular, whereas in the second sentence, the phoneme "s" signifies the plural.[27] In like manner, "the 'er' in hitter and greater forms two different morphemes meaning 'one who' and 'comparative form of the adjective,' respectively," writes Black.[28]

Phonemes

As observed above, in addition to morphemes, there are also phonemes in words. Remember that a phoneme is the minimal unit of speech sounds in a language that distinguishes one utterance from another. Windham illustrates this distinction with the words *pie* and *lie*. For instance, the "p" in "pie" and the "l" in "lie," distinguish these two words.[29] Each phoneme is essential to a correct identification of the vocalization. Phonemes help to convey a specific meaning or concept in a language. Generally speaking, morphemes are longer than phonemes. Morphemes may also help to furnish lexical meaning as well as point toward grammatical distinctions.

GRAMMATICAL ELEMENTS IN THE GREEK VERB ΛΥΨΩ LUW

To illustrate the grammatical elements in the Greek, the verb λυψω (luw, "I loose") is used to draw attention to the importance of identification of morphemes. The morpheme ω (w) appears in the present active indicative of λυψω (luw, "I loose").[30] The ω informs one that the verb has as its subject an individual person who is loosing. The following chart is listed in order to illustrate how the grammatical morpheme helps the reader to determine whether the first, second, or third person is under consideration and also to determine whether the verb is singular or plural:

Chart: The Verb Λυψω Luw, "I Loose"

λυψ ω	luw "I loose"	λυ ψο μεν	luomen "we loose"

λυ ψεϊ	lueis "you loose"	λυ ψε τε	luete "you loose"
λυ ψει	luei "he looses"	λυ ψουσι	luousi "they loose"

In "I loose," the grammatical morpheme ω (w) identifies this verb as a present active indicative, first person singular.

To illustrate the lexical elements in the Greek noun, the noun ηΣγεψομαι (&geomai)[31] is chosen since this is a form of the word employed in **Hebrews 13:17**. This Greek word describes "the ones leading you." By analyzing the lexical morphemes in the word &geomai, this will enable the reader to understand more clearly the import of the word. ᾳHγεψομαι (&geomai) is built on the root ΑΓ (ag, "drive," "lead," "weigh"), which generally has to do with "leading."[32] Harold Greenlee's comments are helpful in this particular area:

> For words whose derivation is not obvious, the derivation is given in parentheses—e.g., ηΣγεψομαι (α[γω, agw). In some instances in which doubt remained, I have consulted other works including the unabridged editions of LS [Liddell—Scott].[33]

The word ηΣγεψομαι is irregular, but, nevertheless, the root is AG (ag). The "a" in "ag" changed to long "h" (η). To assist the reader in recognizing the root in various words, the following list is reduplicated from Metzger's book on *Lexical Aids*:

Chart: The Root ΑΓ AG:

Words Formed from This Root

GREEK	TRANSLITERATION	DEFINITION
α[γω	agw	I lead
αςναψγω	anagw	I lead up; middle, I put to sea, set sail
αςπαψγω	apagw	I lead away
εισαψγω	eisagw	I lead in, I bring in
εςξαψγω	exagw	I lead out
παραψγω	paragw	I pass by
περιαψγω	periagw	I lead about, I go about
προαψγω	proagw	I lead forth, go about
συναψγω	sunagw	I gather together
συναγωγηψ	sunagwgh	a synagogue
αςρχισυναψγωγö	arcisunagwgos	a ruler of the synagogue

εςπισυναψγω	episunagw	I collect, gather together at one place
υΣπαψγω	&upagw	I depart
αςγροψ	agros	place where cattle are led or driven, a field
ηΣγεψομαι	&hgeomai	I am chief; I think, regard; I lead through the mind
ηΣγεμωψν	&hgemwn	a leader, governor
α[ξιö	axios	(of equal weight), worthy
αςξιοψω	axiow	I deem worthy, think fit
αςξιψö	axiws	worthily
αςγωψν	agwn	an athletic contest, a contest[34]

As noted above, Metzger gives the following definitions associated with the root "ag": "drive, lead, weight." One may wonder why he assigns these definitions with the root "ag." The following chart helps one to focus in on the various shades of meaning to be attached to words with this root:

ROOT	MEANING	EXAMPLE	DEFINITION
αςγ	Lead	α[γω (agw)	I lead
	Drive	εςξαψγω (exagw)	I lead out
	Weight	εςπισυναψγω (episunagw)	I gather together at one place[35]

Another word that plays a major role in the interpretation of **Hebrews 13:17** is the Greek word πειψθω (peiqw). An understanding of the morpheme of peiqw should assist one in properly understanding the significance of this word as employed by the writer of Hebrews. The root πιθ (piq, "bind") appears in a large number of Greek words. In some formations, the πιθ inserts an ε (e) before the ι (i) to form a diphthong (a combination of two vowels in a single syllable). The diphthong ει (ei) is pronounced as a long "a"; with the combination of π (p), the syllable πει (pei) is pronounced as "pay." The following chart illustrates a sample of the πιθ (piq) words:

Chart: The Root Πιθ Piq:

Words Formed from This Root

GREEK	TRANSLITERATION	DEFINITION
πειψθω	peiqw	I persuade (bind myself)

αςπειθεψω	apeiqew	I disbelieve, disobey (not let myself be bound)
αςπειψθεια	apeiqeia	disobedience, rebellion
αςςπειθηψ	apeiqhs	disobedient
πεποιψθησϊ	pepoiqhsis	trust, confidence
πιψστϊ	pistis	faithful, believing
α[πιστö	apistos	unbelieving, faithless
αςπιστιψα	apistia	unbelief
οςςλιγοψπιστö	oligopistos	of little faith
πιστευψω	pisteuw	I have faith (in) believe
αςπιστευψω	apisteuw	I am unfaithful, disbelieve[36]

Hopefully, the foregoing charts serve to illustrate the complexity in determining the meaning of a particular word. When one understands the basic meaning of the root word, this does give assistance in understanding the various words built upon the root. Another example should also clarify how the root sheds light upon the various applications. The root morpheme in the Greek word λυψω (luw) is λυ (lu), which means, "to loose." Consider the following chart:

Chart: The Root Λυ Lu:

Words Formed from this Root

ROOT	MEANING	EXAMPLE	DEFINITION
λυ (lu)	loose	λυψω (luo)	I loose
		αςςπολυψω (apoluw)	I release, loose from
		αςςπολυψτρωσϊ (apolutrwsis)	Redemption, releasing
		καταλυψω (kataluw)	I lodge (after loosing my clothing)
		παραλυψομαι (paraluomai)	I am a paralytic (I am unstrung)
		παραλυτικοψ (paralutikos)	paralytic[37]

One can detect—just from a cursory glance at the root of λυψω—from the above chart the various combinations that results in

the various uses of the Greek root λυ. A similar observation of the Greek verb for rule (α[ρχω, arcw). The root of this Greek word is αςρχ (arc), which means, "be first." There is also the noun form αςρχηψ (arch), which means, "a beginning." The following chart lists several words built upon the root (αςρχ):

Chart: The Root Αρχ Arc:

Words Formed from This Root

ROOT	MEANING	EXAMPLE	DEFINITION
αςςρχ (arc)	"be first"	α[ρχω (arcw)	(first in point of station), I rule; middle, (first in point of time), I begin
		α[ρχων (arcwn)	a ruler
		αςρχηψ (arce)	a beginning
		αςςρχαι'ö (arcaios)	old, ancient
		αςρχιερευψ (arceireus)	A chief priest, high priest
		υΣΣπαψρχω (&uparcw)	(I am under as a foundation, support), I am, I exist, I belong to
		αςςπαρχηψ (aparch)	first fruits[38]

The root meaning of a word can assist one in understanding the underlying meaning attached to a particular word. This understanding of morphology assists one as he/she endeavors to ascertain the meaning of a word in a given context. As one embarks upon an interpretation of **Hebrews 13:17**, this comprehension of how to analyze words with the same basic root meaning helps one in the determination of the meaning to be attached to any particular word.

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ΠΕΙΨΘΩ PEIQW

> Obey (Πειψθεσθε, Peiqesqe) them that have the rule over you (ηΣγουμεψνοϊ, &hgoumenois), and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you (**Hebrews 13:17**, KJV).

The question that confronts everyone is, what definition should one attach to the Greek word that is translated as "obey" in **Hebrews 13:17**? Is there justification for translating πειψθω (peiqw) as "obey"? Yes! But it all depends on what you mean by "obey." The author of this Epistle is not suggesting that Christians "unscrew" their heads and let certain ones in the congregation do their thinking for them. Thus, if one has this kind ("lord it over") of an attitude about "obey," then this is not

correct. If, on the other hand, one interprets the Greek word as "obey" in reference to what he said earlier in this same chapter (**vv. 1-7**), then "obey" would be a legitimate translation.

The kind of domination that many elders, preachers, and editors of religious journals advance is the opposite of what Paul writes, as cited above, to the Corinthians: "Not that we lord it over (κυριευψομεν kurieuomen) your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm" (**2 Corinthians 1:24**). Alfred Marshall in his transliteration of the Greek text translates the Greek word κυριευψομεν (kurieuomen) as "we rule over."[39] But Paul negates this "we rule over" with "not"—"not that we rule over." Yet, today, elders, who are not inspired, claim rule over God's children. It is in this identical vein that Peter cautions elders about exercising "rule" over God's people. Listen, once more, to Peter as he issues his warning:

> To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over (κατακυριευψοντё katakurieuontes) those entrusted to you, but being examples (τυψποι tupoi) to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. [5] Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (**1 Peter 5:1-5**).

Christians were to imitate their shepherds' (leaders) daily walk with God. This kind of submission is the same exhortation to the Hebrews: "imitate their faith" (**13:7**). As one seeks to eliminate so much tradition that covers the Word of God, it is necessary to repeat over and over again the Scriptures that deny the traditional view concerning the proper sphere of leadership. Peter's words ought to be considered in one's interpretation of the Hebrews passages. One cannot set in opposition one Scripture against another as Satan did in his encounter with Jesus (see **Matthew 4:1-11**). The thrust of **Hebrews 13:7**, for instance, deals with imitating the life of godly men (leaders) who were examples of holiness in daily living: "Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." These "leading ones" pursued righteousness, love, peace, and faith.

These godly men had put their Christianity into practice. They possessed the mind of Christ (see **Philippians 2:1-8**). These leaders were individuals who maintained the characteristics that Paul enumerates in his short epistle to Titus:

[5] The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten
out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every
town, as I directed you. [6] An elder must be blameless, the
husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and
are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. [7]
Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be
blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to
drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. [8]
Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good,
who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. [9] He
must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been
taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and
refute those who oppose it. [10] For there are many rebellious
people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the
circumcision group. [11] They must be silenced, because they
are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought
not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. [12] Even
one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars,
evil brutes, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true.
Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in
the faith [14] and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the
commands of those who reject the truth. [15] To the pure, all
things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not
believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and
consciences are corrupted. [16] They claim to know God, but
by their actions they deny him. They are detestable,
disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (**Titus 1:5-16**).

No child of God will rebel against the kind of leadership that Paul draws attention to. On the contrary, one will subject himself/herself readily and courteously to the behavior set forth by elders. For Paul, an elder had to hold firmly to the message of salvation, that is to say, Jesus as God's way of salvation—not Jesus plus circumcision. Those who advance another way of salvation other than "faith" in Jesus as God's way of salvation should be considered anathema, whether by elders, preachers, editors of religious journals, or angels (see **Galatians 1:6-9**).[40]

Why did Peter write what he did in **1 Peter 5:1-5**? Why did Paul write to the Corinthians what he did in **2 Corinthians 1:24**? Both of these Scriptures must be taken into consideration as one seeks a proper understanding of **Hebrews 13:17**. If one considers the participles in the Hebrews' passages, then one can arrive at an interpretation that is in harmony with the whole of God's Word. It is significant that the participles employed by the author of Hebrews speak of leaders, not rulers. God's leaders are to serve, not to have power over. Leaders do not have the "right of sovereignty" over one's faith. If God had given

leaders such sovereignty, then those under the selected few could not be held accountable in the event of false doctrine embraced by the leaders.

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says: "Not that we lord it over (κυριευψομεν kurieuomen[41]) your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm" (**2 Corinthians 1:24**). Paul specifically says, "not that we lord it over your faith." This particular Greek word that Paul employs in **2 Corinthians 1: 24** is clearly missing in **Hebrews 13: 7, 17**, and **24**. The so-called rulers today cite **Hebrews 13:17** to give clout to their abuse of this passage. What is significant about the participle is that this verse does not use the Greek word for elder (πρεσβυψτερö presbuteras, "an old man, an elder"—used of age), but the word for leading (ηΣγεψομαι Jhgeomai). This text does not identify the ones leading. The Greek participle is more comprehensive and more sweeping than is the word *elder*.

Is not the answer to these two questions (proposed above) to be found in Jesus' rebuke of the apostles when they were arguing about who is the greatest? Listen to Jesus as he cautions the disciples about their striving for positions of power:

> [25] Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers (α[ρχοντë arcontes) of the Gentiles lord it over (κατακυριευψουσιν katakurieuousin[42]) them, and their high officials exercise authority (κατεξουσιαψζουσιν katexousiazousin[43]) over them. [26] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:25-28**).

The religious leaders (elders, preachers, and bishop editors) still demand absolute control over the faith of its members. They think they are "rulers," even though God has never made them rulers. One can learn once more from Matthew's account of Jesus' warning against the religious leaders of His day:

> Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: [2] "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [3] So you must obey (ποιηψσατε poihsate, "do you") them and do (τηρει'τε threite, "keep") everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. [4] They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. [5] "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; [6] they love the place of honor at banquets and the most

> important seats in the synagogues; [7] they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' [8] "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. [9] And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. [10] Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. [11] The greatest among you will be your servant. [12] For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (**Matthew 23:1-12**).

Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders for their hypocrisy—say and do not--and the admonition to the crowd to do what they say is an excellent commentary on **Hebrews 13:17**. The author of Hebrews calls attention to leaders who not only said, but were also leaders who practiced what they preached. The Hebrews' author writes: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (**13:7**). In addition to his castigation of the religious leaders for their lack of faithfulness to God in their daily lives, He also rebukes them for their elevated opinion of themselves. The traditional interpretation of **Hebrews 13:17** does not fit in with the teachings of Jesus, Paul, nor Peter. In other words, the believers were to imitate their leaders, not just in the sense of doctrine—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus—but they were also to put their faith into practice in their daily lives.

Πειψθω (peiqw) and the Imperative Mood

The author of Hebrews employs the imperative mood in **13:17**. But the imperative mood is not just associated with commands; it is also employed in the sense of encouragement, that is to say, to encourage or ask someone to do something.[44] The context is the deciding factor. But the word may also be translated "persuade" or "win over." The word *persuade* does not carry the same nuance that the word *obey* conjures up in the mind. Many leaders have taken a perfectly good word and turned it into something that has almost a threatening tone. For this reason, this paper will extensively cite Scriptures in which the word peiqw occurs—or at least some form of this word. The background of the passage must be consulted to determine which word is the most appropriate for the situation in the twenty-first century. There are numerous Scriptures within which the word πειψθω (peiqw) occurs. One discovers that sometimes one translation fits the context better than another translation. The form that appears in the Greek text is Πειψθεσθε (Peiqesqe), which means, "be persuaded" or "to have confidence." The identification of this verb is a second person, plural, present, passive, imperative.

Even though the word is imperative, and may be translated "obey," nevertheless, the context seems to require the translation of "be persuaded," which is not quite as harsh as the current use of the word

obey. To illustrate the passive imperative, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is quite helpful in this matter of interpretation. Paul writes: "Do not get drunk (μηΨ μεθυψσκεσθε, mh mequskesqe) on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled (πληρου'σθε, plhrousqe) with the Spirit" (**Ephesians 5:18**). The first phrase "Do not get drunk" and the second phrase "be filled" are present, passive, and imperative forms. The Greek construction of both verbs in **Ephesians 5:18** are identical in form to **Hebrews 13:17**. The focus of **Hebrews 13:17** is that of "be persuaded." Obedience is the underlying tone of the phrase "be persuaded."

The English word *obey* is too strong a translation for πειψθω (peiqw), at least in this context. Even though obedience is inherent in this word, nevertheless, "persuasion" is the nuance to be attached to peiqw, rather than the word *obey*. The objective of "persuasion," as employed by the author of Hebrews, is to seek allegiance or submission on the part of the hearers. An excellent example of this meaning is also found in Luke's narrative of Paul's defense before king Agrippa. When Paul seeks to persuade Agrippa to respond to the Gospel, he is seeking obedience to the Good News of God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul as he addresses Agrippa:

> The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced (πειψθομαι, peiqomai[45]) that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. [27] King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." [28] Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade (πειψθεϊ, peiqeis[46]) me to be a Christian?" [29] Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains" (**Acts 26:26-29**).

The New American Standard Bible translates the word peiqomai as "persuaded" rather than "convinced": "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner" (**26:26**).[47] Then in verse twenty-eight, the verb is translated as "persuade" (NASB). The Contemporary English Version translates the Greek word peiqeis as "talk me": "Agrippa asked Paul, "In such a short time do you think you can talk me into being a Christian?"[48] The concept that lies behind the word peiqw is the idea of convincing or talking to someone in order to bring about a desired behavior. The idea is not that of a single individual or a group of men operating as a board of directors to issue ultimatums to be carried out by lay-people.

Even if one should translate πειψθω (peiqw) as "obey," the question that must be answered is, what were they to obey? Does this

obedience require blind obedience to a select group of men who act as infallible interpreters of the Word of God? Can other individuals (leaders) demand conformity to their way of thinking?[49] For example, one's views on Sunday school, individual communion cups, church treasury, grape juice in the Lord's Supper, breaking bread, pinching bread, and so on, are interpreted differently in various fellowships. Is there a certain group of elders that everyone must submit to? What is happening within the various factions of the Churches of Christ today is the same thing that John, an Apostle of Jesus, encountered with Diotrephes:

> I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. [10] So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church (**3 John 9-10**).

The "Diotrephian Spirit" is still alive and well on planet earth. Are men and women not responsible for studying the Scriptures for themselves? Many well-meaning leaders adopt a "Diotrephian" spirit toward other believers. This same spirit is still prevalent among sincere Christian leaders. Many leaders refuse fellowship with other believers if their views do not coincide with their own presuppositions. Many Christian leaders will not accept another Christian if his/her interpretation does not harmonize with their interpretation on divorce and remarriage, the use of one container in the Lord's Supper for the distribution of the fruit of the vine, the manner of breaking or pinching of the bread in the Lord's Supper, the employment of Sunday school, and so on.

Are Christians to surrender all interpretation of God's Word to a select few—three or four men? Do certain men speak *ex cathedra*?[50] Again, as one reflects upon the context of **Hebrews 13:17**, one discovers that the area of controversy centers around the English word *obey*; this translation is responsible for all kinds of havoc within the Churches of Christ. Just what is the author of Hebrews seeking to convey when he admonishes the believers to submit (obey) to their leaders? If one would begin with verse one of this chapter, one would quickly see that this obedience involves holiness as one's way of life. For instance, one should read carefully and thoughtfully the following advice:

> Keep on loving each other as brothers. [2] Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. [3] Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. [4] Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for

> God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. [5] Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (**Hebrews 13:1-5**).

The obedience required in **Hebrews 13:17** had to do with loving one another, entertaining strangers, ministering to those in prison, faithfulness to the marriage covenant, eliminating covetousness, and learning contentment. Is it any wonder that the author of Hebrews encourages the believers to "be persuaded" by their leaders to right ethical behavior? This obedience had nothing to do with blind conformity to fallible interpreters who insisted that everyone must comply with their brand of orthodoxy. This philosophy of "obey them that have the rule over you" contradicts **1 Corinthians 8** and **Romans 14 and 15**. **Hebrews 13:7** also adds credence to the above scenario of certain things to be added to their daily walk with God. Did the leaders walk this way? The author says;

> "Remember your leaders (ηΣγουμεψνων, &hgomenwn, "the ones leading you"), who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. [8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (**13:7**).

The Christians were to "consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." This is the obedience that the Hebrews author is pleading. It is significant that even the word &hgoumenwn is translated as "rule" in the King James Version. The NIV translates this word as "leaders." Again, as one seeks to comprehend the word that Paul employs (peiqw), one's attention upon this particular word should be of help. Listen to W. E. Vine as he draws attention to this neglected aspect of correct interpretation:

> 2. PEITHOM (πειψθω, (3982)), to persuade, to win over, in the Passive and Middle Voices, to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey, is so used with this meaning, in the Middle Voice, e.g., in Acts 5:36, 37 (in ver. 40, Passive Voice, "they agreed"); Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:3. The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.[51]

Vine correctly states the force of the word when he says, "The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion." Words frequently convey many different meanings. One must be careful that he/she does not import motives to the writer that he never had. If one allows his/her presuppositions to interfere with what the author actually said, one may miss the originally intended relationship projected by the word employed. The word πειψθω (peiqw) occurs approximately fifty-five times in the New Testament.

This word is translated as “persuaded,” “trusted,” “obeyed,” “agreed,” “made,” “confidence,” and so on. The context is the determinative factor in seeking a proper translation of this word in order to convey accurately the intent of the author. The following Scripture citations illustrate how scholars translate the word πειψθω (peiqw) in other contexts:

> But the chief priests and the elders persuaded (ε[πεισαν, epeisan[52]) the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed (**Matthew 27:20**).
>
> Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied (εςπειψθοντο, epeiqonto [53]) to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing (**Acts 5:36**).
>
> Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively (πειψθων, peiqwn[54]) about the kingdom of God (**Acts 19:8**).
>
> Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade (πειψθεϊ, peiqeis[55]) me to be a Christian?” (**Acts 26:28**).
>
> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince (πειψθων, peiqwn [56]) them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (**Acts 28:23**).
>
> You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying (πειψθεσθαι, peiqesqai[57]) the truth? (**Galatians 5:7**)

Even though the word *obey* is an accurate translation of the Greek word πειψθω (peiqw), nevertheless, the English word *obey* is too strong and does not carry the nuance that is to be attached to the basic meaning of the Greek. One cannot deny that “obedience” is associated with the word peiqw. **Hebrews 13:17** does teach obedience, but the question is, Obedience to what? The conformity (obedience) is to the pattern of teaching concerning ethical behavior, not the blind whims of a few select individuals who have set themselves up as infallible interpreters. Bultmann makes the following succinct observation that peiqw does sometimes carry the connotation, or implication, of “obedience.” He writes:

> The use of πειψθεσθαι (peiqesqai) is of no great theological significance in any of these passages apart from R. 2:8; Gl. 5:7. Underlying the antithesis of R. 2:8 is the thought that the true relation to God is that of obedience. . . . In Gl. 5:7 the πειψθεσθαι αςληθειψα (peiqesqai alhqeia) is materially though not verbally identical with the υΣπακουψειν τω' ευςαγγελιψώ (&uakouein tw euaggeliw) of R. 10.16.[58]

Bultmann parallels the following Scriptures to illustrate that one who rejects, or disobeys (**Romans 2:8**), the truth is on par with one not obeying (**Romans 10:17**) the truth, even though two different Greek words are employed in the two passages.

ROMANS 2:8	GALATIANS 5:7-8	ROMANS 10:16
But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth (αςπειθου'σι τή' αςληθειψα, apeiqousi th alhqeia) and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.	You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth (τή'] αςληθειψά μηΨ πειψθεσθαιΨ, th alhqeia mh peiqesqai)?	But not all the Israelites accepted the good news (υΣπηψκουσαν τώ' ευςαγγελιψω, &uphkousan tw euaggeliw). For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

In **Romans 2:8**, Paul uses the negative of peiqw ("reject," or "not to be persuaded"), but the same word in Galatians—without the alpha privitive—is translated "persuasion." On the other hand, Bultmann maintains that one who is not persuaded, or one who obeys not the truth in **Galatians 5:7** is tantamount to the ones not obeying the Gospel in **Romans 10:16**, even though two different words are employed—in **Galatians 5:7** (πειψθω, "to persuade," "to have confidence") and in **Romans 10:17** (υΣπακουψω, "to listen," "to attend"). Yet these two words are, in some sense, synonyms, nevertheless, πειψθω (peiqw) carries the nuance of persuasion.

The Greek word employed by Paul in **Romans 10:17** is also used by him in Ephesians concerning children obeying their parents. He writes: "Children, obey (υΣπακουψετε, &upakouete[59]) your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (**Ephesians 6:1**). Πειψθω may carry the idea of obedience in some contexts. The Greek word υΣπακουψω j&upakouw ("obey") seems to carry a different nuance than the Greek word peiqw ("persuade"). Words conjure up a number of associations in one's minds. Since words convey a special flavor, it is important that an interpreter operate in the same context as the author. The easiest way to learn the principal terms is to study examples that illustrate the various nuances assigned to each word in context. In order to accomplish this

task, the following examples will search words as employed in the Classical Greek usage, the Septuagint, and the New Testament in order to uncover the various meanings behind πειψθω.

Examples of the Imperative Mood

As stated above, the verb πειψθω (peiqw) in **Hebrews 13:17** is a present passive imperative. Since this word is an imperative form, the translations, as a whole, tend toward translating this as a command. But, the imperative mood is also used to encourage or ask someone to do something. The original significance of the imperative is command or exhortation, but it is not confined to this idea.[60] For example, the imperative mood is also utilized for entreaty: "Holy Father, protect (τηψρησον, thrhson,[61] "to watch over," "to guard") them by the power of your name" (**John 17:11**). Even though Jesus utilizes the imperative in His prayer to the Father, one would not translate this as Jesus commanding the Father to do something, but rather of Jesus' entreaty to the Father. The basic concept of the present passive imperative in **Hebrews 13:17** appears to be that of exhortation—keep on being persuaded by the ones leading you to live holy lives.

One does not command God to do something, but rather he/she entreats God. Another example of imperative used in the sense of entreaty is found in the so-called Lord's Prayer in Matthew. Matthew writes: "Give (δοΨ, dos,[62] "to give" [in various senses literally or figuratively]) us today our daily bread" (**Matthew 6:11**). One cannot command God, even though the imperative is used in the prayer, but rather one entreats God to give him/her daily bread. The imperative is built on the present tense stem and indicates a continuous action. The aorist, on the other hand, speaks of undefined action. To assist one in identification of the imperative mood, the following chart is given to aid one in classification:

Chart: Imperative Translation of Λυψω Luw

	PRESENT	FIRST AORIST	TRANSLATION
	ACTIVE		
2sg	λυ'ε (lue)	λυ'σον (luson)	(You) loose!
3sg	λυεψτω (luetw)	λυ'σατω (lusatw)	Let him loose!
2pl	λυψετε (luete)	λυψσατε (lusate)	(You) loose!
3pl	λυεψτωσαν (luetwsan)	λυσαψτωσαν (lusatwsan)	Let them loose!
	MIDDLE		
2sg	λυψου (luou)	λυ'σαι (lusai)	(You) loose for yourself!
3sg	λυψεσθω (luesqw)	λυσαψσθω (lusasqw)	Let him loose for himself!
2pl	λυψεσθε (luesqe)	λυψσασθε (lusasqe)	(You) loose!

3pl	λυεψσθωσαν (luesqwsan)	λυσαψσθωσαν (lusasqwsan)	Let them loose!
	PASSIVE		
2sg	λυψου (luou)	λυ'σαι (lusai)	(You) be loosed!
3sg	λυψεσθω (luesqw)	λυσαψσθω (lusasqw)	Let him be loosed!
2pl	λυψεσθε (luesqe)	λυψσασθε (lusasqe)	(You) be loosed!
3pl	λυεψσθωσαν (luesqwsan)	λυσαψσθωσαν (lusasqwsan)	Let them be loosed!

To help the reader arrive at a clearer perception of the present passive in **Hebrews 13:17**, the following discussion seeks to explore the Classical Period, the Hellenistic (Septuagint) Period, and the Koine Greek Period. The purpose of this study is to aid one in finding the English words which most correctly expresses the original Greek words in **Hebrews 13:17**. Also, in this study, one must consider synonyms in order to arrive at a more accurate rendering of the verse. Synonyms help to ascertain the full meaning of a context. One must also be conscious of one word over another. If the Holy Spirit guides one writer to choose one word over another in a given context, then it may be important to understand why He did so.

Classical Greek Usage of Πειψθω Peiqw

In Classical Greek[63] πειψθω (peiqw) is a many-sided term. It has two basic meanings. In the active voice, it means to persuade or convince. On the other hand, the passive voice conveys the idea of "to be persuaded," which is the second basic understanding. The nuances of the passive voice include the following definitions: "to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in."[64] Liddell-Scott translates the active voice as "prevail upon, persuade, usu. by fair means," and they translate the passive voice as "to be prevailed on, won over, persuaded."[65] Persuasion is the basic concept of the passive, and this perception of the passive played a major role in Greek thinking.

Hellenistic (LXX) Greek usage of Πειψθω Peiqw

The translators of the Septuagint (LXX) used peiqw to translate ten different Hebrew words. However, any Greek thought of "persuading" is foreign to Semitic thought.[66] The Hebrew word jf^B* (B*f^j) is consistently translated in the LXX by the Greek word peiqw. The idea of the Hebrew word is "to trust, put confidence in, inspire trust." For example, consider the following Scriptures from the Hebrew and Septuagint:

[19] The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah:

> "'This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence (B*f^j or peiqw) of yours (**2 Kings 18:19**)?
> Will you rely (B*f^j or peiqw) on him for his great strength?
> Will you leave your heavy work to him (**Job 39:11**)?

Whoever trusts (B*f^j or peiqw) in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf (**Proverbs 11:28**).

Unlike the Classical Greek Age, the LXX translators did not employ peiqw with the idea of "persuasion," but rather with "trust" (nuance of the passive). Peiqw is selected by the LXX to describe putting confidence in God or to depict allegiance to something other than God. One was to "trust" or to "put one's "confidence in" God. For instance, consider the following Scriptures:

> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment Blessed are all who take refuge (peiqw) in him (**Psalm 2:12**).

> Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts (peiqw) in the LORD (**Proverbs 16:20**).

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah develop this theme of trust with the use of peiqw. In other words, the Israelites must put their trust in God, the Holy One of Israel. In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek word peiqw is a term employed to describe Israel's covenant relationship, or lack of it, to God. Peiqw in the Septuagint closely approximates πιστευψω (pisteuw, "to trust, to believe in, to have faith in").

Hellenistic Usage (The New Testament) of Πειθω Peiqw

The New Testament usage resembles the Classical Greek usage in that it bears actively the sense of "to persuade, to convince," or passively "to be convinced." Peiqw appears in the Synoptic Gospels but not in John. Luke uses this word twenty-one times, more than any other writer in the New Testament. To illustrate the Attic (Hellenistic—active) usage of "persuasion" in the New Testament, one's attention should focus upon an episode that took place between Jesus and the religious leaders. For example, Luke records a conversation that took place between Jesus and the chief priest and the teachers of the Law. In this dialogue, Luke writes that the teachers of the Law and the priest sreasoned: "But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded (πεπεισμεψνö, pepeismenos[67]) that John was a prophet" (**Luke 20:6**).

Also, the writer of Hebrews uses a from of this same word when he writes: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident (Πεπειψσμεθα, pepeismeqa[68]) of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation" (**Hebrews 6:9**). The KJV translates this Greek word as "we are persuaded." Both of these

passages (**Luke 20:6** and **Hebrews 6:9**) illustrate the Classical Greek usage rather than the Hellenistic biblical usage (LXX). The Book of Acts presents an almost rhetorical understanding of peiqw that parallels the Classical Greek perception of the expression. The speeches in Acts reveal the value that was placed upon the ability to persuade. The following citations from Luke demonstrates this usage of the word peiqw in the various contexts:

> Some of the Jews were persuaded (εςπειψσθησαν, epeisqhsan[69]) and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (**Acts 17:4**).
>
> And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced (πειψσά, peisas[70]) and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all (**Acts 19:26**).
>
> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince (πειψθων, peiqwn [71]) them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (**Acts 28:23**).
>
> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade (ε[πειθεν, epiqen[72]) Jews and Greeks (**Acts 18:4**).
>
> Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively (πειψθων, peiqwn[73]) about the kingdom of God (**Acts 19:8**).
>
> Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade (πειψθεϊ, peiqeis[74]) me to be a Christian?" (**Acts 26:28**).

Paul's writings also reflect both the Hellenistic and the Classical Greek concept. The Hellenistic idea centers on the idea of "trust," but the Classical Greek idea involves the meaning of persuasion as well as trust. In the writings of Paul, one discovers that he employs the Greek word peiqw, as employed in the LXX (Septuagint), as "trust." For instance, in his letter to Rome, he writes: "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject (αςπειθου'σι, apeiqousi, "to disobey"[75]) the truth and follow (πειθομεψνοϊ,[76]) evil, there will be wrath and anger" (**Romans 2:8**). In other words, those placing confidence in themselves and following evil will incur God's wrath. The one who refuses to obey or trust God follows evil.

Another example of Paul's usage of peiqw (LXX usage) in the sense of "trust" is in his letter to the Corinthians: "Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely (πεποιθοψτε̈ pepoiqotes, "having trusted"[77]) on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (**2 Corinthians 1:9**). Also, Paul, in writing to the Philippians, uses this same Greek word in the sense of "trust": "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence (πεποιθοψτε̈ pepoiqotes, "trusting") in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reasons for such confidence (πεποιθεψναι[78] pepoiqenai, "to trust")" (**Philippians 3:3-4**). As one reflects upon these two verses, one quickly gathers that the words "believe and be obedient" are equivalent to "put one's trust in God."

Just a perusal of Paul's writings reveals that he employs the classical usage of "persuasion" in a number of passages. For example, Paul writes to the Christians in the southern part of Galatia: You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying (πειψθεσθαι[79] peiqesqai, "to be persuaded") the truth (**Galatians 5:7**)? Even though the NIV translators employed the word *obeying*, nevertheless, the idea is still that of "trust" or "persuasion." This dichotomy is sometimes difficult to differentiate. Still, Paul uses the word peiqw in the sense of "persuasion" (Classical Greek usage) in his writings. Paul sought to "persuade" men to follow Christ: "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade (πειψθομεν[80] peiqomen) men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience" (**2 Corinthians 5:11**).

This expression (we persuade) is a regular Pauline expression in his confidence regarding certain matters not being sinful. He writes to the Romans: "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced (πεψπεισμαι[81] pepeismai, "have been persuaded") that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean" (**Romans 14:14**). Hopefully, the employment of repetition may be pardoned. Repetition is sometimes necessary since the minds of men and women are leavened by the traditional concept of "authority" leadership, which is still the prevailing opinion in much of Christendom. As a result of this kind of mentality, one quickly discovers that the vital truths of Christianity are secretly undermined or openly denied by religious leaders. Rudolf Bultmann is perfectly right when he pens:

1. πειψθω in the Active (apart from the Perfect).

   a. The act. πειψθειν is used in the NT in the customary senses, not always sharply differentiated, which are found in Gk. usage from the time of Homer: "to convince," "to persuade," "to seduce (by persuasion)," "to corrupt." The meaning "to convince" occurs in Plat.Resp., I, 327c; Thuc., III, 31, "to persuade" in Hom.Il., 9, 345; Plat.Resp., II, 364b, "to seduce" in Hom.Il., 6, 360, "to corrupt" in

> Hdt., VIII, 134; Lys., 21, 10. Indicative of the role of πειψθειν among the Gks. is the personification of Πειθωψ as a deity, e.g., Hes.Op., 73; Theog., 349. Whereas in Hom. πειψθειν appears only in the "determinative" sense "to persuade successfully," "to convince," in the period which follows the pres. usually expresses intention and the aor. success, though the context decides.[82]

THE ENGLISH WORD "OBEY" IS TOO STRONG FOR THE GREEK WORD ΠΕΙΨΘΩ IN HEBREWS 13:17

As one examines the context, one observes that the Greek word that is translated "obey" is not the most appropriate word for the twenty-first century. Lawrence Richards has given an excellent commentary on the tone of the word *obey* as used by the Holy Spirit:

> Obey/Disobey
> Often our understanding of the Bible is subtly colored. When we read the Bible, we often import a tone of voice in our reading. The words we read may seem harsh or impersonal, or strident, and demanding, not because they are so used in the Bible, but because we intuitively feel this way about the words themselves. This is particularly a danger when we read of obedience or disobedience. All too often the warmth and love that infuse the passages that speak of them are replaced by a cold impersonality that we bring with us that robs Scripture of its meaning. . . .
>
> NT—The Greek words. The two different families of Greek words are linked with "obedience" and disobedience." Peiqw means "to convince" or "to persuade." It is logically linked with obedience; a person who is persuaded to obey a demand obeys it. This root is translated "obey" only three times in the NASB (Ro. 2:8; Heb. 13:17; Jam. 3:3. Another word from the same root is much stronger and is used of obeying a superior. That word is peiqarcew. It occurs four times in the NT (Ac. 5:29, 32; 27:21; Tit. 3:1).[83]

Richards correctly asserts that the idea is that leaders will seek to persuade other believers to be submissive to the teachings of the Messiah. This obedience is not submission to blind, dictatorial rule, but rather is a response to the love of God.

"LEADING ONES": THE GREEK WORD *H*HGOUMENOIS IN HEBREWS 13:17

Again, one must confront the context in order to arrive at the definition to be attached to the Greek word Jhgoumenois. Should this word be interpreted as "ruler" or "leader"? W. E. Vine's comments are very informative in dealing with this word Jhgoumenois. He writes:

> 1. HEMGEOMAI (ηΣγεψομαι , (2233)), akin to A, No. 1, is used in the present participle to denote a governor, lit., '(one) governing,' Matt. 2:6; Acts 7:10.
>
> 2. HEMGEMONEUOM (ηΣγεμονευψω , (2230)), to be a *heµgemoµn,* to lead the way, came to signify to be a governor of a Province; it is used of Quirinius, governor of Syria, Luke 2:2, R.V. (for the circumstances see under ENROLMENT); of Pontius Pilate, governor of Judæa, 3:1.¶ In the first clause of this verse the noun *heµgemonia,* a rule or sovereignty, is translated "reign;" Eng., hegemony.¶
> *Note.* In Jas. 3:4, the verb *euthunoµ,* to make or guide straight, is used in the present participle, as a noun, denoting the "steersman" (R.V.) or pilot of a vessel, A.V., "governor."[84]

Vine calls attention to the fact that the noun ηΣγεμωψν Jegemwn came to be applied to a governor. But the verb Jegemoneuw means to "lead the way." The translations that I have consulted, except the KJV, employs the word *leaders*, not rulers. An example of the word Jegemwn as being translated as "governor" is found in **Luke 22:20**:

> Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power (αςρχη' arch, "rule") and authority (εςξουσιψα exousia) of the governor (ηΣγεμοψνö Jegemonos).

Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, speaks of the "rulers" of this age: "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers (αςρχοψντων arcontwn) of this age, who are coming to nothing" (**1 Corinthians 2:6**). All over again, repetition is necessary sometimes in order to drive home a point that has been covered with a lot of underbrush of traditions for centuries. Even though the words of Jesus were previously cited, it is necessary to cite His words in full again in order for one to see at a glance how Jesus refuted the traditional belief that presently fills many Churches of Christ. Listen to Jesus as he discusses leadership—negative and positive:

> [25] Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers (α[ρχοντë arcontes) of the Gentiles lord it over (κατακυριευψουσιν katakurieuousin) them, and their high officials exercise authority (κατεξουσιαψζουσιν

katexousiazousin) over them. [26] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:25-28**).

In seeking an answer to the word that is translated as "rule" in **Hebrews 13:17** by the KJV translators, one needs to analyze its usage in the Classical Greek age (900 BC to 300 BC), the Hellenistic biblical age (Septuagint [LXX], 270 BC to 250 BC), and the New Testament age. [85] Although the Classical Greek age sheds light upon the development of the word, still this is not a final criteria by which one determines how the writers in the New Testament employed the word. Ultimately the context is the deciding factor. The following is an example of the Classical, Hellenistic, and New Testament usages of the word ηΣγεψομαι Jegeomai:

Classical Greek Usage

In classical Greek, the ηΣγεμωψν Jegemwn was a "guide" who showed the way or "one who did a thing first."[86] The author of this particular article says, "In classical Greek a Jhghmon was a 'guide' who showed one the way or 'one who did a thing first.'" It might also be a "leader" in the army of a chief or king. Josephus used the word to describe a "procurator" or "prefect" (Antiquities 18.3.1).[87]

The verb form ηΣγεψομαι Jhgeomai carries the connotation of "lead, guide; think, consider, esteem, count."[88] This author further calls attention to the classical and New Testament usage of this word:

Classical Greek and Septuagint Usage

There are two primary uses of this word: (1) "to lead, rule, guide" and (b) "to think, consider, esteem, count." In classical Greek Jhgeomai means "to lead" or "to guide," while in the Septuagint and in the New Testament it is used for ruling or leading. In two instances in the Apocrypha (1 Maccabees 9:30 and 2 Maccabees 14:16) Jhgeomai refers to military commanders. In the Septuagint and contemporary non-Christian sources this word is used for officials, princes, or governors.[89]

New Testament Usage

In both classical sources and the New Testament, Jhgeomai can be used for leaders of a religious community (e.g., Acts 15:22; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). The second meaning of the

> word can be seen in a variety of passages. In Acts 26:2; 2 Corinthians 9:5; Philippians 2:6; 2 Peter 1:13 it is translated "to think" or "thought." In Philippians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Hebrews 11:26 it is translated as "to esteem" or "esteeming." The word is rendered "suppose" in Philippians 2:25, "count" or "counted" in Philippians 3:7, 8; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; Hebrews 10:29; 2 Peter 2:13; 3:9. It can also be translated "judge," as in Hebrews 11:11, or they "that have rule over you" as in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24.[90]

As one reads the above comments, one immediately realizes the necessity of consulting the context in making one's determination as to the meaning to assign to a particular word in a given context. This word is multifaceted in that it has many meanings. This author's last comments are taken from the KJV. This translation contradicts other Scriptures that refute this philosophy about Christian leaders as being rulers over God's new humanity. Translators are not immune from their own traditions and are not immune from the influence of other translations. The following citations are given in order to demonstrate that one of the nuances associated with this word is the concept of leading or guiding, which is closer to the New Testament use of this word in **Hebrews 13:17**. For instance, Liddell-Scott defines the noun ηΣγεμωψν jJhgemwn as "guide, leader, commander, and chief."[91] They also define ηΣγεψομαι Jhgeomai as "to go before, lead the way."[92] William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich also give a diversity of meanings for this word Jhgeomai. But, in spite of this diversity, one discovers the basic meaning:

> 1. *lead, guide;* in our lit. only pres. ptc. (oJ) ηΣγουψμενö of men in any leading position (Soph., Phil. 386; freq. Polyb.; Diod. S. 1, 4, 72; Lucian, Alex. 44; 57.[93]

There are two occurrences of this Greek word in the Apocrypha that refers to military commanders:

So now we have chosen you today to take his place as our ruler (α[ρχοντα arconta) and leader (ηΣγουψμενον Jhgoumenon), to fight our battle (**1 Maccabees 9:30**).[94]

At the command of the leader (ηΣγουψμενου Jhgoumenou), they set out from there immediately and engaged them in battle at a village called Dessau.[95]

Hellenistic Biblical Usage (LXX)

As mentioned above, ηΣγεψομαι Jhgeomai in the classical age employed this term principally in the sense of "guide" or to "lead." On the other hand, the Septuagint (LXX) and the New Testament use this same word for "ruling" or "leading." Only the context determines the

nuance to be attached, not etymology. A common error among interpreters is the etymologizing fallacy, that is to say, the historical information with contemporary usage. The etymology (evolution) of a word may help to discover its sense, but only if it can be confirmed that the writer was cognizant of that etymology. The following comments by Darrell L. Bock are insightful in word analysis:

Word meanings can be examined in two ways. First, words can be studied historically by examining how they have been used in the past and how they have changed in meaning through time. This is called *diachronic word analysis*, the approach of TDNT and NIDNT. These two reference tools examine a word's use beginning with the classical Greek period and continuing through the NT or even the patristic period. Examining words in this way indicates the possible senses that a term may have.

Second, words can also be studied within a given period (e.g., the intertestamental period, or pre—A.D. 70), or within the writings of a specific author (e.g., Paul, John, Matthew, Philo, or Josephus). This is called *synchronic word analysis* since the meaning of a word in its specific context, either temporal or literary, is the major concern of the exegete.[96]

The following quotes from the Old Testament illustrate the use of Jhgeomai in the sense of Master or king:

Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, 'These people have no master (ηΣγουψμινον Jhgouminon = /w{da* a*don. Let each one go home in peace'" (**2 Chronicles 18:16**).

He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The house of Israel will never again defile my holy name—neither they nor their kings—by their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings (ηΣγουψμενοι Jhgoumenoi = El#m# m#l#k) at their high places. [8] When they placed their threshold next to my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them, they defiled my holy name by their detestable practices. So I destroyed them in my anger. [9] Now let them put away from me their prostitution and the lifeless idols of their kings (ηΣγουψμενοι Jhgoumenoi = El#m# m#l#k), and I will live among them forever (**Ezekiel 43:7-9**).

All of the above illustrations demonstrate that etymology alone is not sufficient to determine the meaning that one should assign to a

particular word; context is the deciding factor. The following extract from Black should explain why one should exercise caution in seeking to determine word meanings from etymology alone:

Summarizing, then, the etymological method, used alone, cannot adequately account for the meaning of a word since meaning is continuously subject to change. . . . Above all, to know what a word means we must consider its context. Meaning is then extracted from the passage in which the word is found. . . . This confusion of word and concept, Barr complains, is one of the chief faults of *Kittle's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT). In treating individual words as if they were concepts, it implies (correctly) that the words themselves contain the various theological meanings assigned to them. But the meaning of words, as we have seen, is determined from the way they are used in context. These larger literary contexts, and not words, are the real linguistic carriers of theological meaning.[97]

If one wishes to understand the words peiqw and Jhgeomai in **Hebrews 13:17**, one must consult the context as well as other parallel passages that deal with leadership. The word that is usually translated as "rule over you" is looked at once more under the caption "Hellenistic Biblical Usage (New Testament)" in order to demonstrate the versatility of this word.

Hellenistic Biblical Usage (New Testament)

In both classical sources and the New Testament, Jhgeomai can be used for leaders of a religious community, not just rulers or governors. For example, consider the choosing of certain men to go with Paul and Barnabas among the brethren following the council meeting at Jerusalem. In the following account, one discovers the same word as employed by the author of Hebrews applied by Luke to two individuals that were leaders within the Christian community:

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders (ηΣγουμεψνοϋ jJhgoumenous[98]) among the brothers (**Acts 15:22**).

Remember your leaders (ηΣγουμεψνων jJhgoumenwn[99]), who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. [8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (**Hebrews 13:7**).

Obey your leaders (ηΣγουμεψνοϊ Jegoumenois[100]) and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an

account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (**Hebrews 13:17**).

Greet all your leaders (ηΣγουμεψνοϋ Jegoumenous[101]) and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings (**Hebrews 13:24**).

As stated above, one observes that the Greek word ηΣγεψομαι Jegeomai is varied in its meanings. The context is the deciding factor. The KJV's translation of this Greek word in **Hebrews 13: 7** and **17** contradicts Jesus' plain statement to His disciples about rulers in the world and the disciples' relationship to one another as servants. But to illustrate this point of diversity in meaning, one only has to consult other Scriptures. The following Scriptures demonstrate the variable use of Jegeomai.

> But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers (ηΣγεμοψσιν Jegemosin, "governors") of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler (ηΣγουψμενϋ Jegoumenos, "governor"[102]) [**Matthew 2:6**].
>
> Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. [25] Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over (κυριευψουσιν kurieuousin) them; and those who exercise authority (εξξουσιαψζοντε exousiazontes) over them call themselves Benefactors. [26] But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules (ηΣγουψμενϋ Jegoumenos, "governing" or "leading"[103]) like the one who serves (**Luke 22:24-26**).
>
> "King Agrippa, I consider (ηΣγημαι Jhghmai, "think" or "to regard"[104]) myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, [3] and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently (**Acts 26:2-3**).
>
> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider (ηΣγηψσατο Jhghsato, "deemed"[105]) equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (**Philippians 2:6**).

> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered (ηΣγηψσατο Jhghsato) me faithful, appointing me to his service (**1 Timothy 1:12**).

The KJV translates the above Scriptures respectively: **Acts 15:22**, "chief"; **Hebrew 13:7**, "which have the rule over you' **Hebrews 13:17**, "that have the rule over you"; **Hebrews 13:24**, "that have the rule over you"; **Matthew 2:6**, "Governor"; **Luke 22:26**, "chief"'; **Acts 26:2**, "think"; **Philippians 2:6**, "thought; and **1 Timothy 1:12**, "counted." On the other hand, the RSV translated the above Scriptures respectively: **Acts 15:22**, "leading men"; **Hebrews 13:7**, "leaders"; **Hebrews 13:17**, "leaders"; **Hebrews 13:24**, "leaders"' **Matthew 2:6**, "rulers" and "ruler"; **Luke 22:26**, "leader"; **Acts 26:2**, "think"; **Philippians 2:6**, "count"; and **1 Timothy 1:12**, "judged." One can see at a glance the latitude that translators have in seeking to convey the original. The following comments by F. Buschsel also illustrates the diversity of meanings found in the word Jegeomai:

> 1. This word means a. "to lead," b. "to think," "believe," "regard as." In the NT it occurs in sense a. only in the present participle (see 2) . . . 2. a. Jhgoumenoi (mostly plural) is used for community leaders in Heb. 13:7, 17, 24. These are example of faith (v. 7) and pastors responsible to God (v.17); they are thus to be obeyed (v. 17), and are mentioned before the saints (v. 24). Yet according to Lk. 22:26 the Jhgoumenos is the one who serves—a necessary check on officialdom. Judas and Silas are called "leading men" among the brethren in Acts 15:22.[106]

It seems, at least from the context, that the best translation of the three occurrences of this word (Jhgeomai) in **Hebrews**, **chapter 13**, is best translated as "the ones leading you." The basic concept is "to lead," "to guide"; it is not "to rule." Dictatorship or "exercising lordship over" is automatically ruled out because of what Jesus spoke to His disciples concerning their relationship to one another (see **Matthew 20:25-28**). Since these Scriptures (**Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24**) do not identify "the ones leading you," one may surmise that these could be evangelists, teachers, and teaching pastors (elders—older men). This obedience to their "leaders," or "guides" come about by "feeling," not "coercion." One must interpret the text of **Hebrews 13** as it is written; one must not force an unnatural meaning to the text in order to force the traditional opinion of certain men as rulers within the company of the redeemed. Ray Stedman's lengthy comments are worth citing as he calls attention to the KJV's translation of the Greek word, Jhgeomai:

> In 13:7, the author recalled to his reader's minds the influence for good left by mentors who were now gone. In verse 17, he urges respect for and compliance with the godly leaders they now have. This verse, along with 1 Thessalonians 5:12, has

> been widely misunderstood because of the faulty translation of the KJV, NIV and other versions. The words obey (twice here) and submit and the phrase from 1 Thessalonians 5:12 "are over you in the Lord" have often fueled a harmful authoritarianism that has turned pastors into autocrats and congregations into personal domains. Such a twisted view of authority ignores entirely Jesus' words to the disciples: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you: but whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Mk 10:42-43, RSV). . . . Perhaps those words, "it shall not be so among you," have been among the most ignored sayings of Jesus within the churches. Wherever leadership views itself as having God-given authority to impose rules or limitations on individual Christians or a congregation without their willing consent, these words of Jesus are being violated. Warnings against "lording it over the brethren" are given in 2 Corinthians 1:24 by Paul, in 1 Peter 5:3 by Peter, and in 3 John 9-10 by John. . . . The author's basis for urging his readers to give willing response to their leaders is that the leaders are godly men who feel deeply their responsibility to lead wisely and lovingly as men who must give an account. This account must be given, not to the congregation, but to the Lord (1 Pet. 5:2-4).[107]

Unfortunately, today the English word *obey* is saddled with antibiblical nuances. It appears that the KJV conveys the ideas, concepts, notions, and presuppositions of the men behind the King James Version rather than the nuances intended by the author of Hebrews. Instead of translating the Greek participles—Jhgoumenwn (**v. 7**), Jhgoumenois (**v. 17**), Jhgoumenous (**v. 24**)—as "rule over you" (**vv. 7, 17, 24**, KJV), it would be more accurate to translate these participles as the "ones leading you."[108] As stated above, the Greek text is simply: τοι῾ ηΣγουμενψων tois Jhgoumenwn (v. 7), τοι῾ ηΣγουμεψνοϊ tois Jhgoumenois (**v. 17**), and τοι῾ ηΣγουμεψνοϋ tois Jhgoumenous (**v. 24**). All of these participles simply mean: "the ones leading you." What is conspicuously absent in all three verses are the words: (1) κατακυριευψω katakurieuw ["lord it over"], and (2) κατεξουσιαψζω katexiysuazw ["have authority over"]. It is quite obvious that the translators of the KJV were guilty of smuggling into the text an alien idea to help the "cult of the bishops." The KJV's translation of these three verses in Hebrews is at variance with the teaching of Jesus (see **Matthew 20:25-28; 23:1-11**).

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENT IN TRANSLATIONS

The Verb "To Run"

What meaning should one attach to the word peiqw? The context is the deciding factor in seeking to determine the exact shade of meaning to be assigned to any particular word. Interpretive clues to the meaning of a word in a particular passage are found in the context. If, for example, someone uses the word *run* in a sentence, how does one go about interpreting the monosyllable word? One can almost hear the cry—context, context, and context. Yes, the context would be the determining factor in one uncovering the meaning.

Beekman and Callow add helpful insights to the word *run*. They develop the problems that translators run into when they seek to find the "dynamic equivalent"[109] in another language. These two scholars illustrate the difficulties that translators encounter with "dynamic equivalent" through the word *run*. The following is a powerful statement that calls attention to the dilemma:

> "To run" also has a wide range of "prepositional collocations, such as "run out of the house," run for office," "run into trouble," "run over a child," "run below average." No other word has this particular collocational range in English. . . . However, many of the collocations permissible for run in English are not permissible in Chol—Chol noses do not run, nor do their stockings, jellies, or motors. They do not run for office, or into debt, or trouble, or out of money or time or patience.[110]

Again, the context is the deciding factor in one's seeking to understand the exact shade of meaning to be assigned to any particular word. Interpretive clues are generally provided by the context, which helps one to determine the meaning of a given word in a particular passage. If, for example, someone uses the word *run* in a sentence, the question that confronts everyone is: how should one interpret the word *run*? Yet again, the context would be the deciding factor. To illustrate this principle still further, one should take note of the word *run* in the following quote:

> Each word in a language has a unique collocational[111] range, both qualitatively, in its selections, and quantitatively, in the number of possible collocations. Some words can collocate with only one generic class, or even only certain member of it; others can collocate widely. For instance, the verb "to run" collocates with several generic classes—humans, animals (with legs), liquids, garments, for example—as subject, whereas the verb "to mew" only collocates with cats and certain birds, such as gulls and hawks, which have a cry like the mewing of a cat. "To run" also has a wide range of "prepositional" collocations, such as "run out of the house," "run for office," "run into trouble," "run over a child," "run below average." No other word has this particular collocation range in English.[112]

This citation is given in order to illustrate the wide range of meaning attached to the verb "run." As one reflects upon the verb "run," it is apparent that any definition assigned to any word depends on the context. This, too, is also true of the Greek word peiqw, which also has a variety of meanings. It is true that one definition of this word is "obey," but, as previously pointed out, W. E. Vine correctly calls attention to the nuance to be attached to this word: "The "obedience" suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion."[113] It goes almost without saying that every definition hinges upon context. If one fails to take into consideration the intent of the author, then one violates sound principles of hermeneutics. Once more, what meaning should one attach to the Greek word peiqw?

Again, context is the final appeal to determine the meaning to be assigned to any word. It is not uncommon for a range of concepts to be imbedded within a single word. To arrive at a correct interpretation of a particular word, one must analyze the "bundles of components of meaning" (that is to say, the number and selection of meaning components combined in a word) and "semantic perspective" (that is to say, the semantic interrelationships that may exist between different words). Since words are semantically complex, it is often necessary to "unpack" the bundle of components when translating. This tactic ensures that the sense of the word in a given passage is not distorted. This paper seeks, through examples, to "unpack" the various Greek words employed by the author of Hebrews. Through an examination of the evolution of certain words found in this much abused text (**Hebrews 13:17**), one should be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the author's intended meaning.

The Verb "To Dress

Another illustration concerns the verb "to dress," which has several senses. Just a quick glance at some of the ways in which this verb form is employed is quite striking. Again, Beekman and Callow illustrate with extreme clarity the problems that translators frequently incur in seeking ways to express the multiple use of words in some languages:

> To dress timber
> To dress ranks
> To dress poultry
> To dress a wound
> To dress a salad
> To dress a shop window
> To dress oneself[114]

The following excerpt from the writings of Rudolph Bultmann explains the complexity that scholars face in searching for the exact word or phrase to translate a particular Greek word:

c. πειθοψμεθα in Hb. 13:18 (vl. πεποιψθαμεν) means "we are convinced"; this is also the meaning of πειψθομαι in Herm.s., 8, 11, 12. Ac. 26:26 is weaker: λανθαψνειν γαΨρ αυςτοΨν τουψτων ους πειψθομαι ουςθεψν, "I believe that none of these things can be unknown to him." The perf. especially has the sense "I am convinced" in Lk. 20:6; R. 8:38; 14:14 (οἰδα και· πεψπεισμαι); 15:14; 2 Tm. 1:5, 12; Hb. 6:9; Ign.Tr., 3, 2; Ign. Pol., 2, 3; Pol., 9, 2; Barn., 1, 4. The pass. aor. πεισθη§ναι is used similarly, cf. Ac. 5:40 after Gamaliel's speech: εςπειψσθησαν δε· αυςτω`/, "they were persuaded by him" or "they followed him." πειψθεσθαι, like πεισθη§ναι, can often mean "to be won over by persuasion," "to follow," Ac. 21:14; 23:21; 27:11; Ign.R., 7, 2; Herm.m., 12, 3, 3. In Lk. 16:31 following is almost obeying; here the ουςδε; … πεισθηψσονται, which corresponds to the preceding oujk ajkouvousin, is best translated: "they will not let themselves be told." The meaning can be "to obey" in, e.g., Hb. 13:17: πειψθεσθε τοι§ ηΣγουμεψνοϊ υΣμω§ν και· υΣπειψκετε, Jm. 3:3, of horses which obey the bit, and esp. R. 2:8: toi`" … πειθομεψνοϊ τη§ αςδικιψα/, where the antithesis toi`" … αςπειθου§σι τη§ αςληθειψα/ makes the sense perfectly clear. So also Gl. 5:7: αςληθειψά μη· πειψθεσθαι (occasionally interpolated into 3:1 as well). πειψθονται τοι§ ωΣρισμεψνοϊ νοψμοϊ occurs in Dg., 5, 10.[115]

Bultmann is correct in calling attention to the correctness, in some contexts, of translating the Greek word πειψθεσθε peiqesqe, ("to be persuaded," **Hebrews 13:17**) as "to obey." Even if one translates this Greek word peiqesqe[116] as "obey," and not as "be persuaded," the question that still confronts everyone is this: Are Christians to render blind obedience to the requirements of the so-called ruling elders? These leaders that Paul mentions that Christians are to listen to had to do with bringing one's life into harmony with the ethical standards of Christianity and not reverting back to the Law as a means of one's right standing before God. But this is not the situation today.

CULTURAL CLASH

Not only should interpreters consider *diachronic[117]* word analysis (The examination of words studied historically by examining how they have been used in the past and how they have changed in meaning through time.), but should also consider "cultural clash" in one's examination of any text. A "cultural clash" is not a collocational clash (Collocational clashes are lexical combinations with components of meaning that are not compatible.). In other words, for instance, the following sentence is grammatically correct, but, at the same time, it contains four lexical collocations: "I never have heard a green horse

smoke a dozen oranges." An example of this phenomenon is the communion narratives reported by both Matthew (**26:20**) and Luke (**22:14**). Both authors employ the Greek word for "recline" (αςψναψκειμαι anakeimai), not "sat" as employed in the KJV. Why did the KJV use "to sit" rather than "to recline"?

In all likelihood the translators saw a cultural problem here, since reclining was/is not the position in the English-speaking world for eating. Yet, reclining is a historical reference to the cultural practice of that day. In spite of the cultural practice, the translators substituted "sat down" for "reclining," which actually misrepresents what in point of fact took place.[118] This perception also sheds light upon the translators rendering of **Hebrews 13:17** to give absolute authority to the cultural practice observed in King James' day—"obey" the dictatorial polices of the king and his bishops. In other words, it was culturally right to consider King James as the head of the church. Thus, one finds the wording, "obey them that have the rule over you" to coincide with the times, not the original intent of the author, that is to say, a blind obedience to the leaders. In spite of King James and his bishops' political philosophy, this passage is still cited by many sincere godly leaders as justification for their dictatorial policies for absolute submission to whatever they dictate the Scriptures to teach.

JAMES 3:3 VERSUS HEBREWS 13:17

Some individuals latch onto Bultmann's comments on the use of πειψθω peiqw in James 3:3, which reads: "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us (πειψθεσθαι peiqesqai[119]), we can turn the whole animal." In the above quote by Bultmann, one cannot disagree with him that the best translation for **James 3:3** concerning the bit, or bridle, in the horse's mouth is best translated "to obey." Although the "bit" persuaded the horse, nevertheless, the final result is that the horse obeyed. But does this Scripture citation justify translating the Greek word in **Hebrews 13:17** with the same denotation (a direct specific meaning as distinct from an implied or associated idea), that is, the same meaning as employed in **James 3:3**? Is blind obedience the focal point of the Greek word peiqw in **Hebrews 13:17**? Do leaders put "bits" in the mouths of its members and then pull the reins in order to make one obey? Are the saints "horses" to be whipped into line at the whims of a few men?

The question that confronts everyone is: What were those Christians to obey? Once more, one must emphasize that the context is the answer to this apparently misunderstood Scripture. **Hebrews 13** reveals that they were (1) to continue in brotherly love [**v.1**]; (2) to practice hospitality to strangers [**v.2**]; (3) to minister to the prisoners [**v. 4**]; (4) to honor the marriage bed [**v.4**]; (5) to be content with possessions [**vv. 5-6**]; (6) to respect faithful leaders [**vv. 7, 17**]; and, (7) to imitate the behavior of their leaders [**v. 7**]. This kind of obedience and submission advanced by the author of Hebrews is a far cry from the

"popery" that is generally practiced by many leaders today within the various splinter groups within the warring factions of the Churches of Christ.

Abnormal Interpretation of James 3:3

A former professor of mine recently cited **James 3:3** in which he spoke of horses that obey the "bit" in their mouths. This Christian brother alluded to this Scripture to justify "blind obedience" to a board of directors—called elders. This Scripture was mentioned to give validity to the current interpretation—absolute control by the elders—of **Hebrews 13:17**. As I listened to this sincere believer, one could not help but wonder if this passage (**James 3:3**) teaches that the congregation represents "horses" and that the elders are the "riders" and the "bits" are placed in the mouths of the congregation by the elders in order to force obedience to their dictates. One must keep in mind that the mere definition of a word does not necessarily define that particular word in its own context. The framework of the Scripture must also be consulted. How does one go about determining the particular meaning to attach to a particular word? Perhaps, the words of Thomas Hartwell Horne goes a long way in one's uncovering the meaning that one should attach to a particular word. Horne is correct when he writes:

> Although, in interpreting words that have various meanings, some degree may exist as to which of their different senses is to be preferred; yet the ambiguity in such cases is not so great, but that it may in general be removed, and the proper signification of the passage in question may be determined; for the SUBJECT MATTER—that is, the topic of which the author is treating—plainly shows the sense which is to be attached to any particular word.[120]

Another author, L. Berkhof, stresses the necessity of consulting parallel passages in seeking to determine the meaning of a given context. He has correctly observed the importance of comparison of parallel texts:

> It is possible that neither the etymology of a word, nor the connection in which it is found, are sufficient to determine its exact meaning. In such cases, it is of paramount significance to study parallel passages, in which the same word is found in a similar connection, or in reference to the same general subject. Each passage consulted must, of course, be studied in its connection. . . . Moreover, it is necessary that the phrase or expression that calls for explanation be clearer in one passage than it is in the other, for it is impossible to explain an obscure passage by one that is equally dark. It is hardly necessary to remark in this connection that the interpreter should carefully guard against the mistake of trying to

> illustrate a perfectly clear passage by one that is less perspicuous.[121]

PROPER USE OF LEXICAL AIDS

A word of caution is appropriate in the use of lexicons when one is seeking to understand the meaning of a word or words. Why is there such difficulty in translation of these passages (**vv. 7 &17**)? An exact translation is not always an easy task, not even for scholars. For the beginning student of Greek, a word of caution is in order concerning lexical studies. Even though one must utilize lexical aids, nevertheless, one must understand that the lexicographer also assumes to some extent the role of an exegete when he defines words in a given context. Joseph Henry Thayer explains the difficulties involved in translation this way:

> The nature and use of the New Testament writings require that the lexicographer should not be hampered by a too rigid adherence to the rules of scientific lexicography. A student often wants to know not so much the inherent meaning of a word as the particular sense it bears in a given context, or discussion:—or, to state the same truth from another point of view, the lexicographer often cannot assign a particular New Testament reference to one or another of the acknowledged significations of a word without indicating his exposition of the passage in which the reference occurs. In such a case he is compelled to assume, at least to some extent, the functions of the exegete, although he can and should refrain from rehearsing the general arguments which support the interpretation adopted, as well as from arraying the objections to opposing interpretations.[122]

David Allen Black's book dealing with linguistics is extremely helpful for an individual to arrive at a more correct comprehension of the author's intended meaning. He correctly says, "The easiest way to learn the principal terms in rhetoric is to study them with an example and, where applicable, a comparison with related terms."[123] Again, this writer is on target when he writes about "rhetorical language," that is to say, a language that must be interpreted in a way that does not contradict the intent of the author. This consciousness of idioms (The language peculiar to a people or to a district, community, or class.) helps one to understand the text more clearly. He correctly writes:

> Discussion of idioms brings up the related matter of the consciousness and intention of the speaker. Not only do words mean many things to many people; they are also frequently charged with rhetorical connotations that sometimes say more than their lexical denotations. Thinking of meaning only in terms of lexical or syntactic items can easily lead to disregard for the crucial role of rhetorical features as signs having meaning for receptors.[124]

TWO WORDS SIMILAR IN MEANING:

OBEY (ϒςΠΑΚΟΥΨΩ) AND PERSUASION (ΠΕΙΨΘΩ)

To illustrate a little more forcefully the intent of the author of Hebrews, an examination of another word that is also translated "obey" (υΣπακουψω Jupakouw) should assist one in discovering the various nuances to attach to a particular word in translation. Although the word Jupakouw is a synonym[125] to peiqw, jJupakouw seems to be the stronger of the two words. Peiqw carries within its meaning the idea of "persuasion," whereas Jupakouw carries within its meaning the idea of "to listen or give ear to," which is still closely related to the word *persuasion*. Even though the two words carry similar concepts, yet they are not identical in meaning.

Obey: υΣπακουψω Jupakouw

The Greek word Jupakouw is from the preposition υΣποψ Jupo ("under, by, by means of, about, subject to") and αςκουψω akouw ("hear, heed, listen, understand, learn, give, a hearing"). This word occurs approximately twenty-one times in the New Testament, eleven of which are attributed to Paul. A more accurate interpretation of this word can be gained by an examination of texts that employ the same expression. The following Scripture citations give one a feel for this particular word:

> The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey (υΣπακουψουσιν j&upakouousin[126]) him!" (**Matthew 8:27**).
>
> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey (υΣπακουψειν jJuakouein[127]) its evil desires (**Romans 6:12**).
>
> Children, obey (υΣπακουψετε Jupakouete[128]) your parents in the Lord, for this is right (**Ephesians 6:1**).
>
> Slaves, obey (υΣπακουψετε Jupakouete[129]) your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord (**Colossians 3:22**).
>
> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey (υΣπακουψουσιν Jupakouousin[130]) the gospel of our Lord Jesus (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**).
>
> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed (υΣπηψκουσεν Juhkousen [131]) and went, even though he did not know where he was going (**Hebrews 11:8**).

From the above Scriptures, it is noteworthy that the Greek word meaning "persuasion" is not the underlying connotation (The suggesting of a meaning by a word apart from the thing it explicitly names or describes.), or undertone. As one reflects upon **Matthew 8:27**, one quickly observes that the winds were not persuaded to obey Him. In the other five Scripture citations, one also discovers that out-and-out obedience is the thrust of the various statements, not persuasion. To illustrate the nuances between the words peiqw (persuade or win over) and Jupakouw (obey), one's attention is called to children's obedience to parents. For example, before children are mature in judgment, the father or the mother may say, "You must obey (Jupakouw) my voice." In other words, there are no "ifs," "ands," or "buts" about it. One simply submits, no persuasion (in its strictest sense). On the other hand, if one's child is a teenager, then the father or the mother may seek to get the child to obey (peiqw) with logic.

Through reason, the teenager is persuaded to pursue a particular course of action. Both were submissive (younger and older), but from different perspectives. One may seek to persuade (peiqw) his/her child to follow a specific path that would be advantageous for the child. Yet, having said this, it is not "You obey (Jupakouw) my voice," but rather, the parents seeks to "persuade" the child to obedience. Persuasion (peiqw) is the best method to use to entice one to good performance, that is to say, persuasion that is based on what is in the best interest of the child. The tactic of persuasion is much more effective if the father or the mother are following their own advice of practicing what they want their teenagers to adhere to. So it is with the "obedience" in **Hebrews 13:17**. No one objects to submission (υΣπειψκετε Jupeikete, "you submit"[132]) to holy men who encourage holy living. The leaders alluded to in **Hebrews 13:17** were practicing what they were seeking to persuade others to follow.

This submission is not submission to the abnormal interpretation of certain Scriptures by mind controllers (some elders, some preachers, and some editors of religious journals). Everyone must "obey," or "be persuaded" to put into practice ethical behavior that will honor God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This obedience is exactly what Paul calls attention to in his first letter to the Corinthians:

> Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:32-33**).

Obedience to Holiness: Peiqw (Persuaded)

Everyone must "obey" in this sense of adherence to holiness, that is, everyone must "be persuaded" to imitate Christ, the King of kings

and the Lord of lords. As one seeks to capture the import of these two words, perhaps, the comments by W. E. Vine concerning the distinction between Jupakouw and peiqw will assist one in placing the proper interpretation upon the author of Hebrews. Vine's definitions are quite illuminating and to the point:

> HUPAKOUOM (υΣπακουψω , (5219)), to listen, attend (as in Acts 12:13), and so, to submit, to obey, is used of obedience (*a*) to God, Heb. 5:9; 11:8; (*b*) to Christ, by natural elements, Matt. 8:27; Mark 1:27; 4:41; Luke 8:25; (*c*) to disciples of Christ, Luke 17:6; (*d*) to the faith, Acts 6:7; the Gospel, Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8; Christian doctrine, Rom. 6:17 (as to a form or mould of teaching); (*e*) to apostolic injunctions, Phil. 2:12; 2 Thess. 3:14; (*f*) to Abraham by Sarah, 1 Pet. 3:6; (*g*) to parents by children, Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; (*h*) to masters by servants, Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; (*i*) to sin, Rom. 6:12; (*j*) in general, Rom. 6:16.[133]

> PEITHOM (πειψθω , (3982)), to persuade, to win over, in the Passive and Middle Voices, to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey, is so used with this meaning, in the Middle Voice, e.g., in Acts 5:36, 37 (in ver. 40, Passive Voice, "they agreed"); Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 13:17; Jas. 3:3. The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion. "*Peithomμ* and *pisteuomμ,* 'to trust,' are closely related etymologically; the difference in meaning is that the former implies the obedience that is produced by the latter, cp. Heb. 3:18, 19, where the disobedience of the Israelites is said to be the evidence of their unbelief. Faith is of the heart, invisible to men; obedience is of the conduct and may be observed. When a man obeys God he gives the only possible evidence that in his heart he believes God. Of course it is persuasion of the truth that results in faith (we believe because we are persuaded that the thing is true, a thing does not become true because it is believed), but *peithomμ,* in N.T. suggests an actual and outward result of the inward persuasion and consequent faith" (The underscored sentence is mine—RDB)[134]

Just a casual reading of Vine's definitions reveals the distinctions that exist between the two words. On the one hand, Jupakouw is more the concept of "obey," but, on the other hand, peiqw is more of the concept of "persuasion." His comments on peiqw fits the context of **Hebrews 13:1-17**. The "obedience' in **Hebrews 13: 7** and **17** results from one's persuasion through the influence, guidance, and exhortation of the religious leaders, not through dictatorial authority. Why were the believers exhorted to "be persuaded" by their leaders? As stated above, **verse 7** holds the key: "Remember your leaders, who

spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." The "leading ones" (ηΣγουμεψνων Jgoumenwn) were holy men and men "full of faith." Christians were to be influenced by the leader's life style. This obedience is not from irrational adherence to a certain group of men or leaders' life styles., but rather the submission is to the lifestyle of men who imitate Christ. Ray Stedman is perfectly right when he writes:

> Several things should be noted about Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. The word "obey" comes from the Greek peiqw, "to persuade." The present imperative middle form, used here, means "permit oneself to be persuaded," yield to persuasion." It definitely does not mean to blindly follow orders. The phrase "those who are over you in the Lord" should simply be "your leaders in the Lord." There is no thought of being "over" anyone, or other being "under" a leader. The authority of a Christian leader is not command authority, but servant leadership. A servant has authority, as Jesus said he had, because he awakens by his living service a desire to comply. Or he is persuasive because of his logic or knowledge.[135]

Hearing God More Accurately in Hebrews 13:17

How can one make an intelligent interpretation of the word *obey* in **Hebrews 13:17**? The answer is the context. One must never seek to interpret a passage in isolation from its context. Even though this rule is a basic principle of hermeneutics, nevertheless, this essential rule is frequently overlooked in one's investigation into the meaning of a particular word. Powerful leaders frequently have difficulty in hearing God's Word accurately. It is not uncommon for the religious leaders' interpretation to become normative and then to be passed on to the members of the congregation as authoritative. The traditions of the church concerning **Hebrews 13:17** still make it difficult, if not impossible, for many Christians to read the Word of God accurately. So many Christians, including professors in religious institutions, are so used to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is almost impossible to dig out the underbrush that prevents sound interpretation. Having said this, one must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret a sacred text that has been handed down by the church fathers. The words of Jimmy Allen about context is on target:

> A word must be defined in the light of its context. A text taken out of context is a pretext. . . . Context takes priority over everything else in determining word meanings.[136]

THE TEXT SERVES AS A WINDOW FOR

CORRECT INTERPRETATION

Frequently, believers do word studies without considering the language used or the background of the passage before drawing a conclusion as to the meaning of the word(s) employed by the author. If one is to do sound exegesis, then one must have a considerable grasp of many issues, which includes historical events in order to understand adequately the dialogues in Scripture. Since the individuals to whom the documents were intended were generally competent to manage such a discourse, the interpreter must place himself within the setting of the receivers of the document. Again, the context must be consulted. The text serves as a window through which one peers into the historical period. For one to ignore the setting, or framework, is to decontexualize [137] the wording of the author.

In order to interpret the Scriptures correctly, the exegete must have a background for biblical interpretation. In other words, there must be a set of standard principles, methods, and procedures for explaining accurately the meaning of the text. One of the best ways to gain this kind of information is to consult commentaries and Bible dictionaries. These books should assist one in a more exact interpretation of Scripture. Nevertheless, one ought to be conscious that a head count of translations, commentaries, and dictionaries do not determine the meaning, but rather they do assist one in focusing on context in order to arrive at a more faithful explanation of the text. One should not violate the author's Spirit-given sovereignty in his choice of words. One ought to allow the context to control his/her theological conception.

In the development of one's studies concerning definitions, one is obligated to keep in mind that there is no such thing as an original meaning apart from specific contextual settings. Far too many believers participate in illegitimate etymological studies.[138] With this perception of contextual studies, the question is: What meaning should one attach to the Greek word peiqw as employed by the author of Hebrews? Is it "persuasion" or is it "obey." One cannot deny, as stated earlier, that obedience is expected from the believers, but this obedience is not blind obedience to rulers. The basic concept of the word employed by the author is "persuasion." Some sincere Christians have latched on to the English word "obey" in order to whip people into obedience to their concept of authority figures. This word is employed in such a way as to give credence to fit their (elders, preachers, and editors of religious journals) own agenda—the molding of one's thinking. Once more, as cited above, one would do well to consult Rudolph Bultmann as he argues convincingly as to the true import of peiqw:

> 1. πειψθω in the Active (apart from the Perfect).
>
> a. The act. πειψθειν is used in the NT in the customary senses, not always sharply differentiated, which are found in Gk. usage from the time of Homer: "to convince," "to persuade," "to seduce (by persuasion)," "to corrupt." The meaning "to

convince" occurs in Plat.Resp., I, 327c; Thuc., III, 31, "to persuade" in Hom.Il., 9, 345; Plat.Resp., II, 364b, "to seduce" in Hom.Il., 6, 360, "to corrupt" in Hdt., VIII, 134; Lys., 21, 10. Indicative of the role of peivqein among the Gks. is the personification of Πειθωψ as a deity, e.g., Hes.Op., 73; Theog., 349. Whereas in Hom. peivqein appears only in the "determinative" sense "to persuade successfully," "to convince," in the period which follows the pres. usually expresses intention and the aor. success, though the context decides.[139]

2. πειψθομαι.

a. In the NT, as in Gk., peivqomai means first "to trust," "to rely on" (Hom.Od., 20, 45; Hdt., VII, 144 [tw`/ qew`/ !]), also "to be convinced, persuaded" (Soph.Phil., 624; Plat.Prot., 388a), consequently also "to believe" (Hdt., I, 8; Plat.Ap., 25e) or "to follow" (Xen.An., VII, 3, 39) (in the sense "to be tractable"); this sense "to follow" can even have the further meaning "to obey" (Hom.Il., 1, 79; Soph.Ant., 67; Plat.Ap., 29d: πειψσομαι δε· μα§λλον τω§ θεω§ η] υΣμι§ν).[140]

c. πειθοψμεθα in Hb. 13:18 (vl. πεποιψθαμεν) means "we are convinced"; this is also the meaning of peivqomai in Herm.s., 8, 11, 12. Ac. 26:26 is weaker: λανθαψνειν γαΨρ αυςτοΨν τουψτων ους πειψθομαι ουςθεψν, "I believe that none of these things can be unknown to him." The perf. especially has the sense "I am convinced" in Lk. 20:6; R. 8:38; 14:14 (οἰδα και· πεψπεισμαι); 15:14; 2 Tm. 1:5, 12; Hb. 6:9; Ign.Tr., 3, 2; Ign. Pol., 2, 3; Pol., 9, 2; Barn., 1, 4. The pass. aor. πεισθη§ναι is used similarly, cf. Ac. 5:40 after Gamaliel's speech: εςπειψσθησαν δε· αυςτω`/, "they were persuaded by him" or "they followed him." πειψθεσθαι, like peisqh`nai, can often mean "to be won over by persuasion," "to follow," Ac. 21:14; 23:21; 27:11; Ign.R., 7, 2; Herm.m., 12, 3, 3. In Lk. 16:31 following is almost obeying; here the ουςδε; … πεισθηψσονται, which corresponds to the preceding ουςκ αςκουψουσιν, is best translated: "they will not let themselves be told." The meaning can be "to obey" in, e.g., Hb. 13:17: πειψθεσθε τοι§ ηΣγουμεψνοϊ υΣμω§ν και· υΣπειψκετε, Jm. 3:3, of horses which obey the bit, and esp. R. 2:8: τοι§ … πειθομεψνοϊ τη§ αςδικιψα/, where the antithesis τοι§ … αςπειθου§σι τη§ αςληθειψα/ makes the sense perfectly clear. So also Gl. 5:7: αςληθειψά μη· πειψθεσθαι (occasionally interpolated into 3:1 as well).

πειψθονται τοι§ ωΣρισμεψνοϊ νοψμοϊ occurs in Dg., 5, 10.[141]

One cannot disagree with Bultmann in his translation of peiqw as "obey," but, at the same time, one must also take cognizance of the nuance behind the Greek word employed by the author of Hebrews—"be persuaded." The underlying meaning of this word is "persuasion" that is exercised on the part of the believer to a life of holiness that is in conformity with biblical faith. This obedience is submission to holy living, not to the interpretation of fallible men as if they were infallible interpreters. The traditional interpretation contradicts Jesus' statement to the apostles in their arguments concerning who was the greatest (see above **Matthew 20:25-28**).

These two Scriptures (**Hebrews 13:17**; **Matthew 20:25-28**) do not contradict one another. But, if one interprets **Hebrews 13:17** with a wooden literalness—without regard to context—then one finds an apparent contradiction in the English text. When two Scriptures come into conflict, the obscure must be interpreted in light of the clear, not the reverse. In **Hebrews**, one has a dark passage (**13:17**), if taken in isolation from its context. Yet, on the other hand, one discovers a light passage in **Matthew 20:25-28**. If one interprets the Greek words peiqw and Jhgomai respectively as "obey" and "rule over you," then this translation contradicts the words of Jesus to His disciples as recorded by Matthew (**20:25-28** and **23:8-11**). But, on the other hand, if one translates the Greek words as "be persuaded by the ones leading you," then this translation does not contradict the plain teachings of Jesus in Matthew.

To illustrate and to assist one in a correct interpretation, or understanding, of the passages in **Hebrews** (**13:7** & **17**), then one should consult Matthew—pardon the repetition—as he records one of the last speeches of Jesus, shortly before His crucifixion. In this pericope, Jesus reacted to those who desired to elevate themselves to places of preeminence. An analysis of this unit in the Matthean passage should shed some light on the proper exegesis of **Hebrews 13:17**. Listen to the words of Jesus as He addresses a group of religious leaders that desire the limelight:

> But you are not to be called 'Rabbi' (ρΣαββιψ Jrabbi), for you have only one Master (διδψαψσκαλö didaskalos) and you are all brothers. [9] And do not call anyone on earth 'father' (πατηψρ pathr), for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. [10] Nor are you to be called 'teacher' (καθηγηταιψ kaqhgatai "leaders"), for you have one Teacher, the Christ. [11] The greatest among you will be your servant. [12] For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (**Matthew 23:8-12**).

Jesus absolutely refuses His disciples the use of "rabbi," "teacher," or even "father" to be employed as titles to distinguish themselves from other believers. He did not want any of the disciples to elevate themselves above others. No one was allowed to adopt the terms "Rabbi," "master" (teacher), or "father" as epithets to separate or distinguish themselves from one another. Why? Listen to Jesus as He responds: "You are all brothers" (**23:8**).

Christians frequently cite Scriptures that appear, at first glance, to sustain their position of individuals exercising authority over other individuals. One such example is the citation of **Titus 2:15**. The professor, mentioned above, that cited **James 3:3** to try to provide evidence that the word peiqw in **Hebrews 13:17** has the same connotation also cited **Titus 2:15** to show that Titus was to exercise "authority" (KJV) over those to whom he labored. In this passage, Paul wrote: "These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority (παψσῃ εςπιταγῃ᾽ pashs epigaghs, "all command"). Do not let anyone despise you."

But, is this the meaning (authority over others) that one is to attach to the Greek word that is translated as "authority." The idea in the Greek text is not so much "authority" as it is with "all impressiveness." One does not object to someone speaking the Word with all impressiveness or "with all command" ("authority," KJV, **Titus 2:15**), but this example does not uphold the ungodly doctrine that Christians are to give their minds and consciences into the hands of certain individuals for their keeping. If one does adopt the word *authority*, one must be conscious that the "authority" had to do with the Word of God, not the individual exercising dominion over one's faith, which Paul refutes in his **second letter** to the **Corinthians** (**1:24**).

The following translation captures the essence of **Titus 2:15**: "You must be continually speaking these things, and continually encouraging and exposing with every requirement [*from God*]! You must never let anyone slight you!"[142] The Greek word is not εςξουσιψα exousia, but εςπιταγηψ epitagh. As one reflects upon the words of Jesus, one does not come away with the idea that certain individuals are given dictatorial powers in order to force them into compliance with their opinions about controversial issues that currently divide Christians. The prevailing interpretation that elders "rule over" God's people is totally unbiblical. Another Scripture that is frequently cited to uphold the doctrine of authoritarian leadership is **1 Timothy 5:17**. The following is a brief review of this Scripture in order to determine if this Scripture is translated according to the intent of the author.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17:

ELDERS THAT RULE (Προι;στημι Proisthmi) WELL

Hebrews 13:7, 17, and **24** are not the only Scriptures that are appealed to in order to uphold the doctrine that elders are to "rule" over God's people. Many sincere Christian leaders give credence to their demands of "rule" by citing **1 Timothy 5: 17**. Even though this passage, on the surface, appears to uphold the traditional view, nevertheless, one must again go back to the Greek text in order to set the record straight once more. The KJV reads: "Let the elders who rule (προεστω'τë proestwtes, "direct," "care for," or "having taken the lead"[143]) well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." This Greek word carries a number of nuances—depending on the context. This particular word carries various distinctions, for example, "to lead," "to manage," "to govern," "to give attention to," "to stand before," "to lead," "to care for," and "to engage in."[144]

One can easily see that one must be careful in seeking the exact nuance that the author intended to convey to his readers. Leaders often fail to do their homework before advancing a notion that is totally out of harmony with the Scriptures as a whole. Because of one's failure to grasp the import of the word as utilized by Paul, then this insufficiency has resulted or contributed to a monumental misunderstanding of leadership among God's people. To help each one to grasp the significance of this word, one's attention is called to the use of this word in the classical Greek usage, the Hellenistic biblical usage (LXX), and the Hellenistic biblical usage (New Testament). An analysis of the various usages in various contexts should set the tone for a more accurate interpretation of Paul's words to Timothy.

Classical Greek Usage—Προι;στημι Proisthmi

Προι;στημι proisthmi ("to stand before or over") is used of those who "stood before" an army in order to lead or of those who "stood over" the affairs of government. It is also employed in the sense of "support," "help," and "care" offered by those in prominent positions.[145] It appears that the KJV interpreted the Greek word in **1 Timothy 5:17** as someone who "stood over," rather than someone who took the lead out of concern for the souls under their oversight. Hopefully, this study of the various usages of this word will help one to formulate an interpretation that conforms to the Word of God.

Hellenistic Biblical Usage (LXX)—Προι;στημι Proisthmi

This verb (proisthmi) occurs eight times in the Septuagint (LXX). In the Complete Biblical Library, one reads the following comment: "In most cases it is used substantively (as a participle) to indicate the head of a house (**2 Samuel 13:17** [LXX, 2 Kings 13:17])."[146] The author of **2 Samuel** writes:

> He called his personal servant (προεστηκοψτα proesthkota [147]) and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her" (**13:17**).

This word also reflects the meaning of "to stand before" in **Isaiah 43:24**:

> Neither hast thou purchased for me victims for silver, neither have I desired the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou didst stand before (προεψστῆ proesths, "to set before"[148]) me in thy sins, and in thine iniquities.[149]

In **1 Maccabees 5:19**, one also finds that the word is employed in the sense of one taking charge of the people in Jerusalem in order to defend the city against an impending assault.

> Unto whom he gave commandment, saying, Take ye the charge (προψστητε prosthte[150]) of this people, and see that ye make not war against the heathen until the time that we come again.[151]

Proverbs 26:17 also uses a form of proisthmi to designate a man who "tries to take charge" of other people's squabbles and thus interferes in something he knows nothing about. The Scripture reads:

> Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles (προεστωψ proestws[152]) in a quarrel not his own.

Hellenistic Biblical Usage (New Testament)—Προι;στημι Proisthmi

Proisthmi appears eight times in the New Testament, all in Paul's writings. Half of this number is found in **1 Timothy**.

> He must manage (προι>σταψμενον proistamenon[153]) his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect (**1 Timothy 3:4**).

> (If anyone does not know how to manage (προστη'ναι prosthnai[154]) his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) [**1 Timothy 3:5**].

> A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage (προι>σταψμενοι proistamenoi[155]) his children and his household well (**1 Timothy 3:12**).

> The elders who direct the affairs (προεστω'τë proestwtes [156]) of the church well are worthy of double honor,

especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (**1 Timothy 5:17**).

In the above passages from **First Timothy**, Paul utilizes proisthmi in setting forth the qualifications for bishop (εςλπιψσκοπον episkopon, "overseer") [**1 Timothy 3:4-5**], the deacons (διαψκονοι diakonoi) [**3:12**], and elders (πρεσβυψτερö presbuteros, "older men") [**5:17**]—all are required to manage ("rule" KJV) their households well. The emphasis is upon the quality of their leadership, not dictatorial rulership. It is noteworthy that the KJV translates "ruleth" (**3:4**), "to rule" (**3:5**), "ruling" (**3:12**), and "rule" (**5:17**) for the Greek word proisthmi, rather than "manage." Again, one witnesses, so it seems, the "cult of the bishops" in the translations of these passages. The import of these Scriptures is simply that the leader must respectfully lead or guide his family; otherwise, he is not fit to stand before God's house to care from them.

This particular Greek word simply means, "to stand before," "to lead," or "to care for." It appears that this word was shaded by the KJV translators to promote the "cult of the bishops," who were on the translating committee for King James, the head of the Church of England. The basic idea associated with this word is not "rule," but rather the concept of "to care for." As one investigates this word proisthmi, the question that confronts every interpreter is: Does "to care for" convey the intended meaning of Paul's use of this word to Timothy? Or does this word imply that one is to dominate, dictate, legislate, mandate, or exercise authority over the Christian community? Since this word conveys a variety of meanings, it is essential that the biblical exegete consider the context in order to try to arrive at a correct use of the terminology.

Just a casual glance at the context of **1 Timothy 3:4** reveals that Paul is speaking of one who cares for his household, or he is one who is concerned to lead his household in a way that leads to holiness. This verse does not seem to speak of this individual ruling his household with an iron fist. The NIV translates this verse: "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect." Again, one discovers a similar use of the word in relation to deacons: "A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well" (**3:12**). In all of the above citations from Paul, one quickly observes that the idea behind the word pertains to one being an example to his family. The other four occurrences of this word appear in the following Scriptures (NIV):

> If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern (οΣ προι>σταψμενö Jo proistajmenos, "the one taking the lead"[157]) diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (**Romans 12:8**).

> Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you (προι>σταμεψνοϋ proistamenous, "taking the lead"[158]) in the Lord and who admonish you (**1 Thessalonians 5:12**).
>
> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote (προι;στασθαι proistasqai, "to maintain"[159]) themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**Titus 3:8**).
>
> Our people must learn to devote (προι;στασθαι proistasqai, "to maintain"[160]) themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives (**Titus 3:14**).

The KJV translates proisthmi as "ruleth" (**Romans 12:8**), "over you" (**1 Thessalonians 5:12**), "to maintain" (**Titus 3:8**), and "to maintain" (**Titus 3:14**). The NRSV translates **Romans 12: 8** as follows: "the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."[161] The following paraphrase of **Romans 12:8** is also to the point of the context: "If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously."[162] The Revised Standard Version is also on target when it translates: "He who gives aid, with zeal."[163] The NASB also captures the true intent of the word proisthmi in its rendering of **Romans 12:8**: "He who leads, with diligence."[164] Reicke seems to have shown conclusively that proisthmi in the New Testament conveys the concept of "to lead." He pungently captures the core meaning of this word:

> 3. The eight instances of proi>vsthmi in the NT contain only intransitive forms of the verb. They occur in the Pauline corpus and fall under the nuances a.-c. to which special attention has been directed above (→ 700, 22 ff.).
>
> In most cases προι>ψστημι seems to have sense a. "to lead" (→ 700, 22 ff.) but the context shows in each case that one must also take into account sense b, "to care for" (→ 700, 29 ff.). This is explained by the fact that caring was the obligation of leading members of the infant Church. Thus Paul says in R. 12:8: οΣ μεταδιδοϋ· εςν αΣπλοψτητι, οΣ προι>σταψμενö εςν σπουδη§, οΣ εςλεω§ν εςν ιΣλαροψτητι. Here the second expression is plainly analogous to the other two, which both refer to works of love. The meaning, then, is somewhat as follows: "He who gives let him do so with simplicity, he who cares with zeal, he who does good with cheerfulness." Yet the whole passage is speaking of the gifts of grace imparted to different office-bearers, so that οιΣ προι>σταψμενοι are a special group

> separated by the Spirit for the primary task of caring for others (cf. αντιλημψεις, κυβερνησεις, 1 C. 12:28). The position is the same in 1 Th. 5:12: προι>σταμενοι. According to the context the task of the προι>σταμενοι is in large measure that of pastoral care, and the emphasis is not on their rank or authority but on their efforts for the eternal salvation of believers. How far there is already reference to specific offices in these passages from R. and 1 Th. is a matter of lively debate; the endowment with the Spirit presupposed in R. is no argument against this thesis, since Spirit and office are not antithetical in the NT, e.g., Mt. 7:29; Ac. 6:3. In 1 Tm. again, where the verb and especially the participle occurs repeatedly, the ideas of guiding and caring are both present. In this case the reference is quite definitely to official leaders in the churches. 1 Tm. 3:4 describes an acceptable bishop as a man who rules (προι>σταμενον) his own house well and can keep his children under control. We then read: "If a man know not how to rule (προστηναι) his own house, how shall he take care of (εσπιμεληται) the church of God?" v. 5. Here, then, "to rule" is the same as "to take care of." Cf. also 5:8: "But if he provide not (προνοει) for his own, and specially for those of his own house …" Then 1 Tm. 3:12 describes good deacons as those who care well (προι>σταμενοι) for their own houses (families and servants). The author certainly has in view the authority of the head of the household (*patria potestas* → V, 949 ff., 961 ff., 1004 f.) but his attention is primarily directed, not to the exercise of power, but to the discretion and care to be shown therein. Finally, 1 Tm. 5:17 says that καλως προεστωτες πρεσβυτεροι (→ 666, 26 ff.) are worthy of double reward, especially those who labour in the word and teaching. The context shows that the reference is not merely to elders who rule well but especially to those who exercise a sincere cure of souls. The second half of the verse makes their diligence in pastoral care the criterion. This is not to deny that here, too, the proi>stavmenoi have a special dignity and play a leading role as elders. In all these instances, however, the verb has in the NT the primary senses of both "to lead" and "to care for," and this agrees with the distinctive nature of office in the NT, since according to Lk. 22:26 the one who is chief (ος ηγουμενος) is to be as he who serves.[165]

From the above citation, his specific comments on the import of this particular word in its relationship to leaders is significant: "According to the context the task of the προι>σταμενοι is in large measure that of pastoral care, and the emphasis is not on their rank or authority but on their efforts for the eternal salvation of believers." The "leading ones" are those who have a sincere, genuine, true, trustworthy interest in seeking to "serve" God's people. They want to lead, conduct, direct,

and govern Christians in their daily walk with the Lord. In short, spiritual leaders want to "care for" God's saints, not rule God's saints. The thought behind the comments of Paul is that leaders are to exercise sincere care for the souls of God's people. Again, it goes almost without saying, whenever one seeks to interpret a word, one must seek its meaning within the context. The thought is that "leading ones" are "to protect," "to represent," "to care for," "to help," and "to further one's spiritual walk."

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the various words upon which many sincere Christians have wrenched out of context in order to give credibility to the current traditions within the Churches of Christ that certain men have dominion over one's faith. As a result of this misapplication and twisting of Scripture, divisions have proliferated when thinking Christians refused to allow certain men to exercise authority over their own minds. One has observed, in this essay, that Christians do not object to obedience demanded by religious leaders concerning instructions about holy living. What Christians do object to is: individuals assuming to "lord it over" or to "exercise authority over" God's heritage.

All Christians are to respond positively to the leadership of godly men concerning holiness. Yes, in this area every Christian is to submit. Men who are appointed or assume the role of leadership must be men who are "full of faith." Christians want to imitate this kind of life style. This is the reason that the author of Hebrews writes: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (**Hebrews 13:7**). This essay is written in order to help leaders become the kind of individuals that the Holy Spirit desires in order that men and women might model their lives after men filled with the Holy Spirit. Even though Paul could say, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm" (**2 Corinthians 1:24**), yet, he could also say,

> Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— [33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:32-33**).

There is nothing wrong with the English word *obey* if this word is understood correctly within its context. The problem many Christians have with the traditional interpretation is that the word *obey* is employed by many leaders in the same sense that children must obey their parents. This mentality can lead to a David Koresh' cult or a Jim Jones' cult in which the members of the fellowship surrender total

obedience to the leader. This essay has sought to examine all of the words frequently cited by many well meaning Christians that appear on the surface to give validity to the demands of some spiritual leaders. As one reflects upon any Greek word, one must always remember that words frequently carry several nuances; thus, one must always consult the context in order to try to arrive at a definition that is harmony with the Word of God.

One cannot deny that the Christian community needs leadership. God gave gifted men and women to the early church in order to bring the church to maturity in their faith and their faithfulness (see **Ephesians 4:11-13**). The Christian church still needs men and women who have dedicated their lives to the study and ministry of God's Word. Hopefully, this essay will assists leaders in their endeavors to lead God's people in a way that is in keeping of Holy Scripture—not as rulers, but as examples of Christian living.[166]

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] See Mary Alice Chrnalogar, Twisted Scriptures: Breaking Free from Churches That Abuse (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, revised edition 2000), 189-200, for an excellent analysis of mind control practiced by many leaders within the Christian church. See also Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) and *Recovering from Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

[3] One does not deny that leaders can take action against other individuals if they live a profligate life or deny the deity of Jesus. All Christians must take a stand upon these issues. The problem comes when elders decide a particular interpretation of a Scripture that does not deal with one of the above issues—immorality and denial that Jesus has come in the flesh.

[4] For a detailed analysis of Romans 14:1—15:7 and 1 Corinthians 8, see Dallas Burdette, "Watch Out for Those Who Cause Division," (ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist (accessed 3 January 2002), located under the caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[5] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1982), 265.

[6] Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 58.

[7] See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 29-68, in which they discuss the "difficulties in hearing the text" and "the forgotten interpreters." I am indebted to these

two individuals for their insightful analysis on the problems that hinder correct interpretation.

[8] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[9] Semantical studies pertain to words and their contextual meanings or dimensions within the biblical text.

[10] Owen L. Crouch, *God Has Spoken: Expository Preaching and Teaching, Hebrews* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990), 446.

[11] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 586.

[12] Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in Frank Gaebelein, Gen. Ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol., 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 152.

[13] E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (South Carolina: Southern Bible House, 1955), 501.

[14] See Dallas Burdette, "Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Paul," [ON-LINE]. Available from http:/www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 3 January 2002], located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under caption DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE.

[15] For an example of what this kind of mind control can lead to, see Dallas Burdette, "David Koresh: An American Messiah?" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 12-7-2001], located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the caption WORLD RELIGIONS AND CULTS.

[16] For my analysis of Ephesians 5:19 and instrumental music, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music: Psalm 150" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 12-07-2001], located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the caption OLD TESTAMENT and then under the caption PSALMS.

[17] Private email to Dallas Burdette from William H. (Bill) Smith Jr., dated Tuesday, December 25, 2001, 9:42am. This citation is quoted with the permission of Bill Smith.

[18] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 264.

[19] Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group) 1997.

[20] This mind-set resulted in the countless loss of life. Hundreds were tortured and put to death because they thought for themselves. For an overview of the consequences of this type philosophy, see Dallas Burdette, "We Speak Where the Bible Speaks" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 9 January 2002], located under the caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the caption HERMENEUTICS.

[21] Gustavus S. Paine, *The Men behind the King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 95-96.

[22] Neal Windham, *New Testament Greek: For Preachers and Teachers* (New York: University Press of America, 1991), 63. I am deeply indebted to Windham for his chapter on morphemes (pp. 63-90) for this study on "Obey Them That Have the Rule Over You."

[23] Ibid.

[24] David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 55.

[25] Ibid., 54-55.

[26] F. B. Huey, Jr. & Bruce Corley, *A Student's Dictionary for Biblical& Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 150.

[27] Again, I am indebted to David Allen Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, 54.

[28] Ibid.

[29] For a detailed study of phonemes, see Windham, *New Testament Greek for Preachers and Teachers*, 63-145.

[30] For a detailed study of λυψω (luw), see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 11-14.

[31] The first syllable ηΣ is pronounced "hay." The rough breathing Σ over the long "e" (η) is transliterated as an "h" in English. The last syllable μαι is pronounced "my." Thus, the complete word is pronounced as hay gay o my.

[32] See Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* (New Jersey: Theological Book Agency, 1969), 49.

[33] Harold Greenlee, *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), viii.

[34] Metzger, *A Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, 49.

[35] See Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, 72. Also see Greenlee, *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon*, 149-150. These two works provide an extensive collection of root words.

[36] See Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, 66. See also Greenlee, *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon*, 104.

[37] Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, 73-75.

[38] Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, 51. See also Greenlee, *A New Testament Greek Morpheme Lexicon*, 161 for a detailed lists of word formations that contain the Greek root αςρχ.

[39] See Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek—English New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1969).

[40] For an analysis of Galatians 1:6-9, see Dallas Burdette, "The Heart of the Gospel" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 3 January 2002], located under MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[41] First Person, plural, present, active, indicative, from κυριευψω kurieuw.

[42] Third person, plural, present, active, indicative, from κατακυριευψω katakurieuw.

[43] Third person, plural, present, active, indicative, from κατεξουσιαψζω katexousiazw.

[44] See William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 307.

[45] First person, singular, present, middle, indicative, from πειψθω peiqw.

[46] Second person, singular, present, active, indicative, from πειψθω peiqw.

[47] *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

[48] *The Contemporary English [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by the American Bible Society.

[49] I know of one brother who became so dogmatic about his interpretation of Scriptures that he eventually had to disfellowship even his wife since she did not agree with him concerning many of his odd interpretations.

[50] When the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, he is speaking with the full authority of the pope; in other words, he is one who is sitting on the seat of authority. Many religious leaders today assume that they too speak with full authority since they are sitting in the seat of authority. This philosophy is totally against the teachings of Jesus and His apostles.

[51] W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 438.

[52] Third person, plural, aorist, active, indicative—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[53] Third person, plural, imperfect, middle, indicative—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[54] Present active, participle, masculine, singular, nominative—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[55] Second person, singular, present, acitive, indicative—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[56] Present, active, participle, masculine, singular, nominative—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[57] Present, passive, infinitive—from πειψθω (peiqw).

[58] Rudolf Bultmann, "Πειψθω" in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., and trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:4.

[59] Verb: second person, plural, present, active, and imperative—from υΣπακουψω (&upakouw, "obey")

[60] See William Hersey Davis, *Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1923), 166-170 for an excellent treatment of the imperative mood. Also see William D.

Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 302-310.

[61] Second person, singular, first aorist, imperative, from τηρεψω threw.

[62] Verb: second person, singular, aorist, active, imperative—from διψδωμι (didwmi).

[63] The Classical Greek period embraces the centuries from Homer (c 900 BCE) to the Alexandrian conquests (c 300 BCE). In this stage the Attic dialect secured dominance. The Greek literature that has come down to this century is predominantly Attic. Attic was the molding force in all the subsequent developments of the Greek language. It constituted the chief basis of New Testament Greek.

[64] See Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., The Complete Biblical Library Series, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press), s.v. "3844, πειψθω (peiqw), verb," 15:124.

[65] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek—English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 1353-1354.

[66] See Gilbrant, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, 15:124.

[67] Perfect passive participle, nominative, singular, masculine, from πειθω, peiqw.

[68] First person plural, perfect passive indicative, from πειθω, peiqw.

[69] Third person plural, first aorist, passive, indicative, from πειθω, peiqw.

[70] First aorist, active, participle, nominative, singular, masculine, from πειθω, peiqw.

[71] Present, active, participle, nominative, singular, singular, from πειθω, peiqw.

[72] Third person, singular, imperfect, active, indicative, from πειθω, peiqw.

[73] Verb: present, active, participle, masculine, singular, nominative.

[74] Second person, singular, present, active, indicative—"to persuade, to have confidence," from πειθω, peiqw.

[75] Present, active, participle, masculine, plural, dative, from αςπειθεψω apeiqew.

[76] Present, middle, participle, dative, plural, masculine, from πειψθω peiqw.

[77] Second perfect, active, participle, nominative, plural, masculine, from πειψθω peiqw.

[78] Second perfect active infinitive, from πειψθω peiqw.

[79] Present, middle, infinitive, from πειψθω peiqw.

[80] First person plural, present active indicative, from πειψθω peiqw.

[81] First person singular, perfect passive indicative, from πειψθω peiqw.

[82] By Rudolph Bultmann, "πειψθω" peiqw," in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:1.

[83] Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible words* (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1985, 461-62.

[84] W. E. Vine, "Governor," *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 276-78.

[85] For an excellent discussion of these ages, see David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 143-169; Dana and Mantey, *A Manuel Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927, reprint 1964), 5-15.

[86] See Thoralf Gilbrant, International Editor, "2215. ηΣγεμωψν Jhgemwn," in *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek-English Dictionary, Zeta-Kappa 2176-2947,* (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 41.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 43

[90] Ibid.

[91] Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, new edition, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones (Great Britain: Clarendon Press, 1973), 763.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 344.

[94] *The Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 1973, 1977.

[95] *The Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 1973, 1977.

[96] Darrell L. Bock, "New Testament Word Analysis," in Scot McKnight, ed., *Introducing New Testament Interpretation: Guide to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 103.

[97] David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, 122-123. His chapter on "Semantics: Determining Meaning" is one of the best treatments that I have read, see pages 120-142.

[98] Present, middle, participle, accusative, plural, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[99] Present, middle, participle, genitive, plural, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[100] Present, middle, participle, dative, plural, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[101] Present, middle, participle, accusative, plural, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[102] Present, middle, participle, nominative, singular, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[103] Present, middle, participle, nominative, singular, masculine, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai. The NIV translates the participle as "the one who rules," but this could also be translated as "the one who leads." See Clean L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III,

The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zonervan,1998), 166, write: "ηΣγουψμενö pres. mid, (dep.) part. ΗΣγεψομαι (# 2451) to lead, to be the leader. Part. As subst."

[104] First person, singular, perfect, passive, indicative, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[105] Third person, singular, first aorist, middle, indicative, from ηΣγεψομαι jJhgeomai.

[106] F. Buschsel, "ΣηΣγεψομαι," in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols.., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 2:907.

[107] Ray Stedman, *Hebrews*, The IVP Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1992), 156-157.

[108] See Gustavus S. Paine, *The Men Behind the King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) for an excellent treatment of the philosophy and power of bishops behind the King James Version.

[109] See F. B. Huey, Jr. and Bruce Corley, "Dynamic Equivalence," *A Student's Dictionary for Biblical & Theological Studies: A Handbook of Special and Technical Terms* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983), 67, where they write:

> **DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE**. A type of translation in which the message of the biblical text is conveyed to the reader with effect equivalent to that for the original reader; closer to a paraphrase and contrasted with formal equivalence.

[110] Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, 163.

[111] Collocation has to do with placing words together in a proper order—arrange. In other words, collocate means to place side by side. For a thorough analysis of collocation, see John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 160-174.

[112] Ibid., 163.

[113] W. E. Vine, "Obedience, Obedient, Obey," *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 438.

[114] Ibid., 97.

[115] See Rudolph Bultmann, "Πειψθω" in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., trans. By Geoffrey Bromiley, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.s, 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 6:4.

[116] Second person, plural, present, middle, imperative, from πειψθω peiqw.

[117] See Millard J. Erickson, "Diachronic semantics," *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 43, where he defines diachronic semantics: "**Diachronic semantics**. Semantical or linguistic study which emphasizes development through periods of time."

[118] One may think this an insignificant point, but in the early 1990s, a first cousin of mine, related to me a strange custom among some one-cup and non-Sunday school churches in which the congregation insisted upon a chair next to the communion table. This odd fellowship was referred to as "the sitting down Church of Christ." Since the KJV translated the Greek word for "recline" as "sat down," this group wanted to follow the so-called "pattern theology" of prescribed rituals for a worship service. In other words, according to many believers, God ordained a blue-print for every act performed on Sunday morning.

, passive, infinitive, from πειψθω peiqw.

[120] Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of Holy Scripture* (Edinburgh 1839; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 404 (page reference is to reprint edition).

[121] L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 80.

[122] Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), XIII.

[123] David Allen Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 133.

[124] Ibid., 132.

[125] A synonym is a word having a meaning that is the same or nearly the same as that of another word in the same language. But no two words are identical or even so nearly identical that we could lose either without loss to the language. Every word can do something that no other word can do. For instance, synonyms for "persuasion" are: inducing, suasion, influencing, enticing, enticement, exhorting, exhortation, seducing, seduction, inveighing, inveiglement, alluring,

wheeling, cajoling, cajolery, winning over, talking over or around; synonyms for "obey" are: submit, answer (to), respond, act (upon or on), bow to surrender, yield , perform, do, carry out, attend to orders, do what one is told, accept, accord, consent, do what is expected of one, do one's duty, redeem one's pledge, do as one says, come at call, serve, concur, accede, assent, conform, acquiesce, mind, take order, do the will of, do one's bidding, comply, fulfill, play second fiddle, and so on.

[126] Third person, plural, present, active, indicative, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[127] Present, active, infinitive, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[128] Second person plural, present, act. Indicative, or imperative, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[129] Second person plural, present, act. Indicative, or imperative, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[130] Present, active, participle, dative, plural, masculine, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[131] Third person, singular, first aorist, active, indicative, from υΣπακουψω Jupakouw.

[132] Second person, plural, active, imperative, from υΣπειψκω Jupeikw.

[133] W. E. Vines, "OBEDIENCE, OBEDIENT, OBEY," in the *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), 438.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ray Stedman, *Hebrews* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 1992), 156-157.,

[136] Jimmy Allen, *Re-Baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again* (Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1991), 236.

[137] See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 84, where they write:

> Ignoring the full historical and literary contexts, and often the individual narrative, people concentrate on small units only and thus miss interpretational clues. If you contextualize enough, you can make almost any part of Scripture say anything you want it to say.

[138] See the following books that issue cautions in this particular field of study: George J. Zemek, "Grammatical Analysis and Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of biblical Exposition,* ed., John MacArthur, Jr. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 154-176; Moises Silva, *Biblical Words & Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); Darrell L. Bock, "New Testament Word Analysis," in *Introducing New Testament Introduction*, ed., Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 97-113.

[139] Rudolph Bultmann, "πειψθω," in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vols., 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:1.

[140] Ibid., 3.

[141] Ibid., 4.

[142] *The Christian Bible: Its New Contract Writings Portion* (Mammoth Spring, AR: Christian Bible Society, 1991).

[143] Perfect, active, participle, nominative, plural, masculine, from προι;στνμι proisthmi.

[144] See Strong, #4291; Bauer, 713; Moulton-Milligan, 541; Kittel, 6:700-703; and Liddell-Scott, 1482-1483.

[145] See Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, Pi-Rho, Word Numbers 3665-4374, # 4150 (The Complete Biblical Library: Springfield, Missouri, 1991), 303.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Perfect, active, participle, accusative, singular, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[148] First person, aorist, active, singular, indicative, from προι; στημι proisthmi.

[149] Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1851; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990, 879 (page reference is to the reprint edition).

[150] Second person, aorist, active, plural, indicative, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[151] Ibid., "The Apocrypha," 151.

[152] Perfect, active, participle, nominative, singular, masculine,, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[153] Present, middle, participle, accusative, singular, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[154] Second aorist, active, infinitive, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[155] Present, middle, participle, nominative, plural, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[156] Perfect, active, participle, nominative, plural, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[157] Present, middle, participle, nominative, singular, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi. See Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek – English New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, 1969), where he translates: "the one taking the lead in diligence."

[158] Present, middle, participle, accusative, plural, masculine, from προι;στημι proisthmi. Ibid., where he translates: "taking the lead."

[159] Present, middle, infinitive, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[160] Present, middle, infinitive, from προι;στημι proisthmi.

[161] *The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

[162] *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1996.

[163] *The Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 1973, 1977.

[164] *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

[165] Reicke, "προι;στημι," in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., and trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vols. 10, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 6:701-702

[166] See Givens Blakley, "Studies Especially for Elders," [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.wotruth.com/elders.htm. This series set forth the "the real role of elders and how it fits into Divine objectives," writes Givens Blakley. Also see the following essays dealing with leadership by Dallas Burdette, "Political Power of the Pharisees and Their Oral Tradition," "Biographical Material on the Life of R. L. Kilpatrick," and "Kilpatrick's Concept of Leadership" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 3 January 2002), located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under caption ELDERS. See also the following essays by Norman Parks: (1) "Jesus Versus the Eldership," (2) "It Shall Not Be So Among You," and (3) "Restoration & Models of the Church [On-line]. Access through Dallas Burdette's ONLINE RESOURCES. Go to http:/www.freedominchrist.net and then to ONLINE RESOURCES and then to ELDERS (Accessed 9 January 2002). Also see Carl Ketcherside, "That All May Be One" (written 1957) [ON LINE]. Available from http:www.unity-in-diversity.org (accessed 9 January 2002). Also see Carl Ketcherside, "The Legal Tangle" (written 1975, vol., 37) [ONLINE]. Available from Ibid. See also Leroy Garrett, "Pell-mell in Little Rock" (Restoration Review, Vol., 29, No. 4, April 1987) [ONLINE]. Available from http:/www.restorationreview.org (accessed 9 January 2002).

The Purpose and Importance of The Sunday Assembly in The Lives of God's People

Thrust Statement: **God does not want His people to neglect the gathering of His saints on Sundays.**

Scripture Reading: **Hebrews 10:19-26**

Is it necessary for God's people to assemble on the Lord's Day? Is it a take it or leave it proposition. Is Sunday just another day of the week without any spiritual significance? What does Sunday mean to you? What is your custom when it comes to the Sunday gatherings of the church? Are you familiar with **Hebrews 10:25**? This text of Scripture is one of the most often cited verses to encourage God's people to assemble together as a corporate body to praise God and to encourage one another in the faith. In spite of what God's Word says about neglecting the assembly, yet, many today, as in the first century, frequently miss the Sunday meeting with the saints. Does it bother you to fail to get together with the church on Sunday morning? Do you regularly fail to assemble with the saints on Sunday morning? One quickly observes from the context of **Hebrews 10** that some Christians were deserting this gathering of the saints. From this account of the early church, one notices that some believers were abandoning the assembly for fear of persecution for their faith in Jesus as God's one and only way of salvation. Was the threat of incarceration and confiscation of property sufficient reasons for neglect? One cannot help but wonder how God viewed the appalling condition of neglect *then* and how he feels about this similar inexcusable condition of disregard *now*.

In the study of God's Word, one must look at the *then* as well as the *now*. Is it okay for Christians today to disregard the assembly? Was it wrong then? Is it right now? Although in the present day, there is an unlike set of circumstances from the first century, at least in America, nevertheless, one wonders why it is okay for God's children to treat the assembly with so much lack of concern. It is time that everyone reexamines his/her own life to see if he/she is obedient to the teachings of God. Even

though Christians do not in this country suffer persecution, Christians are ignoring the Sunday morning assembly. It is not uncommon for believers today to use Sunday as a day to make weekend trips to visit relatives, to participate in sport activities, to take pleasure visits to the beach, to go fishing, to work in their place of employment, and so on.

Is there a reason why God's people should pay no attention to the fellowship on Sunday? Has God arbitrarily demanded His people to meet together just to convene for the sake of saying, "well, we attended"? No doubt, the motive behind this admonition is to challenge consistent involvement in the life of the church. Is this one of the means whereby individuals "draw near to God" (**Hebrews 10:22**)?[1] Today, it is not uncommon for some Christians to withdraw from the local congregation because someone hurt his/her feelings. Some husbands or wives neglect the assembly because their spouses do not want them to attend. Some do not attend because they find the interest of this age more pressing than the things of the age to come. Paul speaks of Demas as one who felt the needs of the present order more pressing that the things of God. In the last letter that Paul wrote, he bemoaned this tragedy in Demas's life; he writes:

> Do your best to come to me quickly, [10] for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. [11] Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. [12] I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. [13] When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments (**2 Timothy 4:9-13**).

Earlier, Paul had written to the church at Colossae (60 CE) with greetings from Demas (**Colossians 4:14**). Demas was also listed in his letter to **Philemon** (**v. 24**). But, approximately six to seven years later, one discovers that Paul calls attention to a change of priorities in the life of Demas. What does it mean to say that Demas "loved this world"? One would be hard pressed to say that Demas left the faith and went off into deep sin. He no doubt had the experience that many Christians experience today. He allowed some of the things of the world to creep into his life and replace the love of God. He started putting other activities between himself and his service for Jesus Christ. Are you like Demas? Paul does not spell out in clear details the tug of war going on within the life of Demas, but, on the other hand, Christians can use this text to examine his/her own life with the Lord Jesus. Are you neglecting Bible reading? Are you neglecting daily prayer? Are you unfaithful to the services at Oakwood Hills Church? Are you careless about visiting those who are absent? Are you so wrapped up in material things that you have no time for God? Again, have you put other activities between you and God?

One can hardly read Paul's statement to Timothy about Demas without recalling the words of John as he sought to combat a form of worldliness. Listen to John as he exhorts his readers:

> [15] Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has

and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. [17] The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (**1 John 2:15-17**).

One cannot read these verses without immediate consciousness that every believer is confronted with two choices. One either loves the Father or else one loves the world. John does not want the saints to fall into spiritual duplicity, that is to say, exhibiting spiritual things while the heart is overcome by the world.[2] What is foremost in your mind? Are you more concerned about spiritual things or material things? Believers need each other's fellowship. Christians need to face their great responsibilities in their daily walk with God. Industry pressures, domestic pressures, community pressures, financial pressures, amusement pressures, and material pressures all militate against our being present at the gatherings of God's people. Believers must refuse to go along with anything that would lure them away from this get-together. Many Christians start off with a big bang. They start off living for the Lord. They start off with burning zeal. They read their Bibles every day. They pray daily. They attend every service of the church. But then something happens—they become lukewarm. Other activities take precedence over spiritual things. It is no longer the practice of many of God's people to meet regularly on the Lord's Day. Why?—Lukewarmness. What does the kingdom of God mean to you? Are you truly a seeker after the righteousness of God? Are you concerned about every thing except the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, calls attention to the necessity of seeking God first in all of one's priorities in life:

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. [29] Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. [30] If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. [33] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. [34] Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (**Matthew 6:28-34**).

Luke also gives a rather interesting account in Jesus' ministry. In this account he records that Jesus attended a synagogue service on a Sabbath day. Was this something unique in His life? Was this something that just occasionally happened? Luke informs Theophilus that the Sabbath gathering was not just an occasional event in the life of Jesus, but rather it was his custom to do this on the Sabbath. Take note to Luke's written account as he tells how Jesus returned to go Galilee and preached in the synagogues. On His arrival at Nazareth, one observes Jesus going into the synagogue and reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. [15] He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. [16] He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.

> And he stood up to read. [17] The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: [18] "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [20] Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, [21] and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (**Luke 4:14-20**).

It was Jesus' custom to attend the public gatherings of God's people, a custom that His followers would continue to practice (**Hebrews 10:24-25**). One might argue that the system was corrupt, or one might argue that Jesus did not need instruction. Still, our Lord made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer and to the place where the Law and the Prophets were read. The synagogue services opened with an invocation for God's blessings, the *Shema* (the traditional confession of faith—**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**), the prescribed readings from the Law and from the Prophets. Following the readings, which were read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic, one would then make comments upon the readings, which Jesus did.[3] This was not an uncommon practice. Generally a sermon followed the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Luke records that both Paul and Barnabas observed this custom of Sabbath meeting:

> From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. [15] After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." [16] Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! (**Acts 13:14-16**).

William Barclay calls attention to the fact that there were seven people who read.[4] One also observes the reading of Scripture in the Christian assemblies. Paul, in his letter to the Christians at Colossae, exhorted the believers to read his writings: "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (**Colossians 4:16**). As one reflects upon the assembly, one can hardly fail to recall the words of Jesus to His disciples: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (**Matthew 18:20**). Even though Jesus is not present in a visible form, nevertheless, His is still present—although invisible—in the midst of His disciples. He is present in the assembly of His people. Yes, Jesus is in the sphere of the Church. He is as much present in the little congregation as He is in the big congregations. He is present in Bible Study Groups; He is present in Prayer Meetings. How wonderful to know that the risen Christ of Calvary gathers with His people—whether they be many or few.

The church is so important that Jesus purchased the church with His blood (**Acts 20:28**). Again, the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved (**Acts 2:47**). How do you feel about the church of Jesus? What is your custom on

Sundays? Where is your interest? Is it in material objects or is it in spiritual things? Are you laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven? Where is your heart? Is it divided? Listen to Jesus once more in the Sermon on the Mount:

> 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust
> destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves
> treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves
> do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will
> be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your
> whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole
> body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how
> great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate
> the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the
> other. You cannot serve both God and Money (**Matthew 6:19-24**).

Where is your devotion? Are you storing up treasures in heaven? As one reflects upon these words of Jesus, one should also reflect upon the story of Martha and Mary. Are you a Martha or a Mary? Which! This story illustrates the differences in priorities between the two sisters. Luke reports this incident in his Gospel:

> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a
> woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called
> Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was
> distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and
> asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by
> myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you
> are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed.
> Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from
> her" (**Luke 10:38-42**).

Which one of the sisters do you relate to? When Christians assemble, one expects to listen to an explanation of the Word of God. Christians are exhorted not to give up the habit of meeting together as some were doing (**Hebrews 10:25**). How do you feel about this passage of Scripture? Are you willing to obey this injunction? Are you like Pharaoh: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him" (**Exodus 5:2**). How do your actions speak? Do you neglect the Sunday assembly? Do you reject Bible reading? Do you neglect prayers? Just what is the course of your life? Are you on the Lord's side? Do you gather with Him on Sundays?

The public assemblies of God's people should be joyous occasions for every believer. I can truthfully say that it is like heaven upon earth to me. My heart often burns within me as I listen to the prayers and hear the singing. As I listen to the Word, my heart leaps for joy. It is true that everyone needs his/her quiet time with the Lord, but it is also true that every believer needs the fellowship of other believers. As long as God gives me health, I will meet with His people to pray together, to sing together, to break bread together, to study God's Word together, and to encourage one another together. Do you still remember your first love for God? Do you remember your zeal for the things of God in your conversion? Has your zeal flickered out like a wick on a

candle? Apathy is a trait that permeates every body of believers. In fact, Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome with the following admonition: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (**Romans 12:11**). Are you zealous for God? Yes, there is orthodoxy, but is there zeal for the things of God? Christianity, for many, has degenerated into a kind of formality. The church in Laodicea is a classic example of lack of interest (**Revelation 3:14-22**)

CONCLUSION

Can one know more about Christ and remain in a state of lethargy? When one truly knows Christ, I cannot think it possible for one to lack zeal. If people knew more about Jesus, it is does not seem possible for sluggishness to abound. Are you willing to vow revenge against your laziness? Are you willing to vow revenge against your failure to meet with the people of God? Are you willing to vow revenge against your lack of love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Why don't we love one another more? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we meet regularly with the saints on Sunday morning? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we read the Bible regularly? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we pray often? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought?

I cannot speak for you as to your motives; I can only speak for myself. My objective in this message is not to tear anyone down, but rather to build up. I want to remind God's people of God's mercy. When one gathers with the saints on the Lord's Day, one partakes of the memorial that God has given to His people—the Lord's Supper. In this memorial, one is reminded of His forgiveness for the penitent soul. As Christians assemble from week to week to commemorate the Lord's Supper, one's mind reflects upon "plenteous redemption," which is ever before the conscience of every individual. This divine act of mercy is ever before the people of God in the Lord's Supper. Sunday is a time of reflection and a time of encouragement. In conclusion, Paul's words to the Corinthians seem appropriate for this study:

> Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? [6] And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. [7] Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. [8] For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. [9] We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. [10] This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down (**2 Corinthians 13:5-10**).

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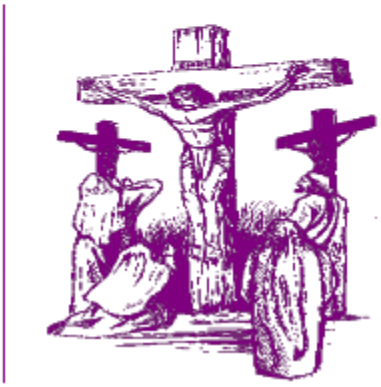
[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] See Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 114, for an excellent commentary on 1 John 2:15-17.

[3] See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 136.

[4] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Daily Study Bible Study Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 46.

Overview of the Book of Ephesians



Thrust Statement: **Paul explains the mystery of God previously hidden from prophets and angels.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 4:3-14**

INTRODUCTION

The **Book of Ephesians** extols the Gospel of Christ. This perception is generally not recognizable to many Christians because they do not pickup on the word *mystery*. Paul unfolds God's grace in this short Epistle. He discloses that the "mystery" kept hidden from ages past is all about the revelation of God's salvation made available to all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. For one to really and truly appreciate the miracle of God's blessings, one needs to count the number of times that one encounters the prepositions "in" and "through." The miracle of "rebirth" is even greater than raising the dead physically and making the physically blind to see. The overall theme in this book is hidden from many devout and sincere believers.

The question that confronts everyone is: Why have so many Christians failed to grasp the significance of this book? The answer lies, so it seems, in the practice of proof-texting in order to advance certain doctrinal beliefs based upon certain texts cited out of context. The source of many divisions today within the Churches of Christ is created when individuals invariably isolate Scripture from its context and then absolutize these Scriptures to teach what its author(s) did not intend. Some Christians read the Holy Writings through the narrow lens inherited from their forefathers. As a result of arbitrarily choosing one text to arrive at a certain dogmatic position, Christians, as a whole, have failed to read the book as a book.

One classic example of piece-meal reading is the philosophy that it is sinful to praise God with instruments of music in the so-called worship service. The idea that it is wrong to employ instruments of music in the public gathering of the church is

culturally conditioned upon traditions handed down from one generation to the next. This study seeks to avoid manipulation of biblical material in order to support prior ecclesiastical interest of a select few. What one discovers within certain circles within the Christian community is a "theology" of preachers and elders who wish to maintain their so-called distinctive roles as "defenders of the faith." As a result of this mentality, one discovers that language is distorted, evidence is ignored, and logic goes out the window. One of the most familiar Scriptures in the **Book of Ephesians** is **chapter 5** and **verse 19**. In addition to this famous citation, two other Scriptures from this book also take their place alongside **Ephesians 5:19**; these two Scriptures are **4:5** and **5:11**. The following is a chart of these three Scriptures:

Ephesians 5:19	**Ephesians 4:4-6**	**Ephesians 5:11**
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.	There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. .	Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

This author, Dallas Burdette, cut his eyeteeth, so to speak, on these three Scriptures. As a young preacher, I never read the **Book of Ephesians** as a book, but rather, I read this book in order to maintain that instrumental music was sinful.[1] I then cited **Ephesians 4:5**—"one faith"—to teach that anyone who advanced the Scripturalness of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine in the Lord's Supper, "breaking" the bread instead of "pinching' the bread, and so on were not a part of the "one faith." It just so happened that the "one faith" was the doctrinal interpretation of God's Word as advanced by the "one-cup and non-Sunday school movement."[2] Then, I cited **Ephesians 5:11** concerning the "unfruitful works of darkness" to give validity to my separation from Christians who disagreed with my interpretation of the Bible.[3] These three Scriptures are still cited by many sincere believers in order to uphold their particular brand of orthodoxy. One objective of this essay is to liberate the **Book of Ephesians** from the nineteenth-and-twentieth-centuries of ecclesiastic assumptions. Many of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ still hold to their own historic position as handed down by their own unique fellowship. Hopefully the following analysis will assist Christians in properly understanding the **Book of Ephesians** as a whole.

READING THE BOOK ACCURATELY

It goes almost without saying that "belief refers to a person's attitude toward a particular statement," but, on the other hand, "There is an important distinction between belief and truth. Truth is not relative, but belief is."[4] Again, Virkler correctly points out: "Beliefs do not change objective reality, although they do change a person's

subjective reality."[5] Instead of decontexualizing Ephesians from its past, this essay seeks to recontexualize the **Book of Ephesians** in terms of Paul's own agenda. One should heed the words of Anthony C. Thiselton, when he calls attention to the application that certain individuals make in their interpretation of the New Testament as being "no more than a manipulative mouthpiece for the interpreter's own conviction."[6]

As one approaches the **Book of Ephesians**, one stands in awe at the spiritual blessings that one experiences "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. This book takes one back, as it were, into eternity past—"before the creation of the world" (**Ephesians 1:9**).[7] Yes, Paul begins this book with the development of the "mystery" of God before the creation of the world (**1:3-14**) and ends this book with a request for the stamina of courage to make known the "mystery" of God, which is the Gospel of Christ (**6:19**). In the **first three chapters**, Paul expands this mystery, and in the **last three chapters**, he sets forth the implications of this mystery of God's will in the lives of God's people.

The central thrust of the Epistle appears to be the development of the "mystery" of God. Following Paul's presentation of this "mystery" in the **first three chapters**, Paul sets forth the implications of this mystery in the daily lives of God's people. The word *mystery* appears seven times in this short epistle (**1:9; 3:3, 4, 6, 9; 5:32; 6:19**). If one neglects to grasp the full import of this mystery in the **Book of Ephesians**, then one fails to appreciate the thrust of Paul's arguments throughout the epistle for unity among the people of God and holiness as one's way of life—twenty-four hours a day, not just one day a week on Sundays. If one does not care to state the overall subject of this Epistle in one's interpretation, one will not get the full picture of the **Book of Ephesians**. This book has one central theme—the unfolding of God's mystery, "which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:9**). Paul employs restatement about the "mystery" of God in order to draw attention to the essential focus of this Epistle.

If one wrenches citations from this book without cognition of its overall theme, one will ultimately utilize certain verses as launching pads for one's own opinions or to uphold one's own traditions. For example, some Christians cite **1:3-14** in order to give credence to their erroneous views concerning predestination (Calvinistic theology) —some predestined to go to Hell or Heaven without regard to faith in Jesus. Still, there are other Christians who cite **4:5** ("one faith") to advance the notion that Paul is setting forth their particular brand of orthodoxy. Yet, there is another group of believers who cite **5:19** as justification for rejection of instrumental music in corporate worship. If one neglects to read the **Book of Ephesians** as a whole, one can easily bend the Scriptures to conform to his/her own thoughts. In other words, what one hears is not the voice of God, but rather one's own voice. Haddon W. Robinson is therefore right when he says,

Having selected the passage, however, an expositor must allow it to speak for itself. Too often a passage will not say what we expected it to say. Topical exposition faces the special danger that the preacher will read something into the scriptural account in order to read something significant out of it. He may resort to "proof texts" for favorite doctrines by ignoring completely the context in which a passage lies. He may be

tempted to transform a biblical author into a modern psychologist by insisting that he say in a sermon what he never said in the Bible. Topical exposition differs form the so-called topical sermon, therefore, in that the thought of the Scripture must shape all that is said in defining and developing the topic.[8]

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Mystery Briefly Explained

Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul breaks out into ecstatic praise as he reflects upon the spiritual blessings in Christ: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**). The spiritual blessings are not outside of Christ, but rather "in Christ." Again, one observes Paul's words as he reflects upon the ones chosen before the creation of the world: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**1:4**). The ones chosen are those who are "in him." Paul develops this concept by saying: "In love [5] he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (**1:5**). Once more Paul stresses the place where all of this activity takes place: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace [8] that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (**1:7-8**).

In **verses 3-8**, Paul spells out the real meaning of the "mystery" in the **Book of Ephesians**. The choosing, the adoption, and the redemption are events that transpire "in" and "through" Him, the savior of humanity. The mystery of God is about His rich grace lavished on sinful beings "in the One he loves" (**1:6**). Paul established the details of this revelation of God's mystery as having reference to Christ:

> And he [b] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**1:9-10**).

The above verses (**1:3-10**) detail the nature of the Gospel, which is described in this book as the "mystery of his will" (**1:9**). Now, Paul brings together two terms—chosen and predestined—mentioned earlier (**1:4-5**) in order to demonstrate where all of this takes place: "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (**1:11**). The choosing and the predestination takes place in Jesus Christ, which is the mystery kept hidden in God from ages past. The question that confronts everyone is: How does one become a part of the chosen and predestined? Paul explains in very clear and unmistakable terms:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our

inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**).

When were the Ephesians included "in Christ"? Paul says, "when you heard the word of truth." What is the "word of truth"? Paul defines this "word of truth" as "the gospel of your salvation." This "word of truth," or "the gospel of your salvation" is equivalent to the "mystery of his will" in **1:9**. But Paul does not stop with the phrase, "when you heard the word of truth," but he continues by saying, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." In order for one to become a part of the chosen or predestined, one must "hear the word of truth" and believe the message of salvation, namely, the mystery of God, which is Christ. In the Colossian letter, Paul writes about this mystery also:

> I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. [2] My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (**Colossians 2:1-3**).

In **Colossians 2:2**, Paul clearly identifies this mystery as "Christ." Earlier, in this same epistle, Paul sets forth this mystery in glowing terms:

> I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— [26] the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. [27] To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (**1:25-27**).

Paul, in both Ephesians and Colossians, seeks to develop an appreciation of this "mystery of God" in order to bring about praise to the One who, from eternity past, decreed how men and women could stand justified in His sight. This mystery involved the reconciling of the whole of humanity unto Himself "in" and "through," Jesus. He wanted all believers "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (**Ephesians 3:18**) in leaving glory to become man in order to redeem sinful humanity (see also **Philippians 2:1-11**).

Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesians and Colossians a clear understanding of the magnitude of what God had actually brought about through Christ (**Ephesians 1:17** and **Colossians 2:1-2**). If one can grasp the significance of this mystery, then one's lifestyle will exhibit holiness on a daily basis. Prior to the unfolding of this mystery through His apostles, the prophets, too, had searched diligently concerning the time frame of this unfolding of the mystery that had been kept hidden in God from ages past (**1 Peter 1:10-13**; **Colossians 2:1-2**). Following Paul's one sentence (**Ephesians 1:3-14**—Greek text), he breaks out once more into ecstasy as he seeks to call attention to the greatness of what God accomplished for mankind in and through Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the wonder of it all:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. [18] I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, [20] which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (**1:17-23**).

Paul wanted God to enlighten their hearts in order that they might come to appreciate something of the richness of what God accomplished in Christ. He wanted them to comprehend this "mystery of his will." In chapter two, he works out in detail the consequences of their belief in Jesus as God's Anointed One for the redemption of the human race. Before leaving this pericope—Spiritual Blessings in Christ—it is significant that Paul sets forth the ethical implications resulting from one's being in Christ: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**1:4**). In **chapters 4—6**, he works out the moral aspects of one's life that results from a change in venue, namely, Christ. The next occurrence of the word *mystery* occurs in **3:3**.

Mystery Developed in Detail

Ephesians 3:3, 4, 6, 9

The next four occurrences of this word *mystery* are found in the **third chapter**. An analysis of the word *mystery* in each of the four verses reveals the nature of this mystery. This mystery is about "the administration of God's grace" (**3:2**). Paul, as it were, employs various phrases to capture the word *mystery*—"the word of truth," "the gospel of your salvation," and "the administration of God's grace." Prior to this last phrase—"the administration of God's grace"—Paul explains the benefits that result from one's union with Christ, which is what the mystery is all about (**2:11-22**). Thus, Paul begins the **third chapter** with the words: "For this reason" (**3:1**). Then in **verses 3—9**, he develops the very heart of this "mystery" that he wanted God to allow the Ephesians to recognize the full import of what He had achieved in and through Jesus Christ. The following verses expound the substance of this mystery:

[2] Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, [3] that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. [4] In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, [5] which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. [6] This mystery is that through the

gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. [7] I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. [8] Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. [10] His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. [13] I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory (**3:2-23**).

In **verse two**, Paul calls this mystery the "administration of God's grace," but in **verse nine**, he calls it "the administration of this mystery." Then in **verse three**, he identifies this "administration of God's grace" as "the mystery made known to me by revelation." Also in **verse three**, he says, "As I have already written briefly." Where had Paul "written briefly" about this mystery? Just a casual glance at **1:3-14** and **1:17-23** reveals the "administration of God's grace" as equivalent to "the administration of this mystery." In **3:3**, he repeats what he desired in **1:18**, namely, the comprehension of insight into the vastness of this marvelous feat of redemption for both Jew and Gentile in and through Jesus Christ (**2:14; 3:6**).

Paul goes right to the heart of this mystery when he writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (**3:6**). The phrase "one body" is significant. In **chapter two**, Paul speaks of "one new man" (**2:15**), "one body" (**2:16**), and "one spirit" (**2:18**). In **chapter four**, Paul calls for unity because there is just "one body" and "one Spirit" (**4:1-6**). The prophets had prophesied this mystery, but the prophets did not understand when the coming of Christ would take place. Peter describes this mystery as "this salvation" as well as "the grace that was to come." Peter, too, develops the unfolding of this mystery that had been kept hidden, even from the prophets:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

The prophets tried to find out when all this would take place. This mystery was hidden even from the angels. They, too, desired to stoop low and look into this marvelous grace, which was hidden in God. In **Ephesians 3**, Paul informs the Ephesians that "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of

God should be make known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose when he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Ephesians 3:10-11**). In other words, the church is a university, so to speak, for the angelic host. It is through the church that the angels learn about this salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. If one preaches the mystery of God's will, then one preaches the Gospel, namely, Jesus.

In **3:6-13**, Paul elaborates on the mystery as the unfolding of God's grace to the Gentiles. God extended grace to Paul in order that he might "preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:8-9**). When one discusses the "unsearchable riches of Christ," one is discussing the "administration of this mystery." When one preaches the gospel, he/she is divulging the means whereby God reconciles the world unto Himself. Paul forcefully concludes with his summation of this mystery that he wrote about briefly in the **first chapter**: "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (**3:12**). Jesus is the object of one's faith. Since Jesus is the object of this "one faith," then Paul speaks of "one Lord" and "one faith" (**4:5**).

The Outcome of This Mystery

Ephesians 2:11-22

The **first three chapters** of Ephesians describe in detail the "mystery of His will" (**1:9**). The objective of this essay thus far has been to zero in on the word *mystery*. Just a perusal of this epistle reveals that Paul seeks to develop their understanding of what this "mystery" is all about—namely, the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile to God "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. In **chapter one**, Paul employs the word *mystery* one time, but, in **chapter three**, he employs the word *mystery* four times. Beginning with **1:3** through **2:22**, Paul endeavors to explain what this "mystery" is all about. A detailed explanation of this mystery is found in **2:11-22**. In this pericope—One in Christ—he explains that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled unto God in "one body" (**2:16**).

In this section (**2:11-22**), he calls attention to the Gentiles by saying: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (**2:13**). Again, one observes that Paul stresses "in Christ Jesus." Paul then deals with the question of Jew and Gentile in their relationship to each other. He says that Jesus is "our peace," and it is Jesus who has created in Himself "one new man out of the two" (**2:15-16**). Thus, Jesus has reconciled both—Jew and Gentile—unto God in "one body." Paul, in this pericope, brings in the Holy Spirit by saying: "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (**2:16**). One can hardly read this unit of Scripture (**2:11-22**) without a consciousness of the expressions of "one body" and "one Spirit." Again, in **chapter three**, Paul explains this mystery as the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile into "one body" (**3:6**).

Unity in the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:1-4

Is it any wonder that Paul speaks of the seven ones in **Ephesians 4:1-4**. In this pericope—Unity in the Body of Christ—Paul says that there is "one body" and "one Spirit." Since this is so, then one should endeavor to maintain the unity created by the "one Sprit" (**4:3**). Paul writes:

> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**4:3-6**).

The phrase "one faith" is frequently associated with one particular brand of orthodoxy. For example, over twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ cite this Scripture in order to uphold its particular beliefs concerning "pattern theology." In other words, the "one faith" represents the belief system that God has ordained a worship service with five ritualistic acts that have to be performed in a prescribed manner. For many Christians, the "one faith" is not faith in Jesus, but rather their weird interpretation of certain Scriptures.

Just a cursory glance of this Epistle by Paul reveals that Jesus is the object of this "one faith," not some odd interpretation placed upon some Scripture. This whole epistle is about "faith" in the "one Lord." For example, Paul having developed this mystery—Christ—(**1:3-14**), he writes: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (**1:15-16**). Again, Paul calls attention to faith in **chapter three**: "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (**3:12**). Earlier, Paul writes:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**1:13-14**).

The "word of truth," "gospel of your salvation," "mystery of God's will," and "Christ" are synonymous terms. What had they believed? They believed that Christ is the one and only way to God. This is why that Paul immediately broke out in praise with the words: "ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus" (**1:15**). Then Paul explains that it is in Christ that one is made alive (**2:1-10**). In this pericope, he writes:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**2:8-10**).

Jesus is the object of one's faith. One is saved "through faith" in Him (**3:12**). No wonder Paul concludes his explanation of the "mystery" with the words, "one Lord, one faith" (**4:5**). Once more, in **chapter three**, Paul writes: "so that Christ may

dwell in your hearts through faith" (**3:17**). Following Paul's use of the expression "one faith" in **4:5**, he discusses how God

> gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [13] until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (**4:11-13**).

"Unity in the faith" concerns a proper understanding of "the knowledge of the Son of God" in God's scheme of redemption. Jesus is the object of the "one faith." Paul wanted God to open their eyes to understand the full meaning of what He accomplished "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul once more as he explains his prayer concerning "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God":

> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (**3:16-19**).

Living As Children of Light

Ephesians 4:17—21

Paul begins the **fourth chapter** of Ephesians with a call to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (**4:1**). The acceptance of Christ into one's life demands a change in one's external behavior. Beginning with **4:17**, Paul encourages those who have placed their faith in Jesus as Lord to live upright and godly lives. As one approaches **chapter five** and **verse 19**, one quickly discovers from the context that Paul is concerned about behavior that will honor God. Unfortunately, too many Christians have lifted **5:19** out of context in order to uphold their objection to instrumental music during the so-called worship service. One cannot limit **5:19** just to a church service. If so, then one would have to limit **verse 18** to a church service also. Is Paul saying that one should "not get drunk on wine" while you are in a church service? Or is he saying that one ought never to get drunk with wine—in or out of the assembly.

Just a casual glance of **chapter five** reveals that Paul is concerned about external behavior in one's daily walk with God. For instance, Paul goes right to the heart of ethical conduct when he writes: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10] and find out what pleases the Lord" (**5:8**). Again, he writes in this same chapter: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (**5:15-16**).

The Ephesians were "to live a life of love" (**5:2**). He wanted them to "understand what the Lord's will is" (**5:17**).

The will of God is that His people refuse to walk in the ways of the world. For this reason, he exhorts the believers: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery" (**5:18a**). This exhortation is not limiting this kind of behavior only to a so-called church service. Rather, he wants them to "be filled with the Spirit" (**5:18b**). Instead of singing lewd songs and making lewd music as the heathen do, one should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in one's heart to the Lord. God desires His people to sing and make music with all their heart to the Lord (**5:19**). **Ephesians 5:19** is in a context of external behavior twenty-four hours a day—whether assembled or not. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to "Have nothing do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (**5:11**). The following chart sets forth the deeds of darkness that Paul warns against:

LIVING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT	
Ephesians 4:25-32	**Ephesians 5:1-8**
Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin"[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.	Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.[b] 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.

Once more, a word of note concerning **Ephesians 5:11** is in order. This passage is frequently cited in order to justify separation from other sincere Christians over trivial doctrinal issues, especailly in the Stone-Campbell Movement. This Scripture is another example of twisting Scripture in order to maintain the traditions of the church. This Scripture is alluded to because of its reference to "fruitless deeds of darkness." The interpretation placed upon this phrase is frequently latched onto in order to justify one's separation from other Christians who participate in the use of individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, teaching children and adults in Sunday school classes, acceptance of **Matthew 5:32** as applicable in the Messianic Age, and so on. This phrase—"fruitless deeds of darkness"—has to do with the works of the flesh, not the frivolous things that Christians fight over. Remember the following before you seek to interpret any Scripture: CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT.

CONCLUSION

This essay began with an analysis of Paul's expression—"mystery"—to describe the spiritual blessings available in Christ Jesus. This paper also sought to briefly examine election, adoption, and predestination in light of Paul's explanation of the "mystery of God's will." In addition to this emphasis upon the word *mystery*, this article also called attention to the misapplication of certain Scriptures—**1:3-14; 4:5; 5:19**; and **5:11**. This discussion of this short Epistle has zeroed in on the context for its analysis. Without context, one can build his or her belief system within the intent of the author(s). It is also significant that Paul began this Epistle with an explanation of the "mystery" of God and concludes this Epistle with a request for prayer in order that he might be faithful, in spite of persecution, to proclaim the gospel of God without fear of man's power of destruction. He brings to a close this Epistle with the following words:

> Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (**6:19-20**).

This mystery is about God's methodology of redemption, namely, Jesus Christ. It is "in" and "through" Jesus that one obtains salvation. Throughout this Epistle, one discovers the following expressions that set forth election, adoption, and predestination as occurring in a particular person: "in Him," "in the One," "in the Lord Jesus," "through Jesus Christ," "in Christ Jesus," "in Christ," "in the Lord," and "through Him." God accomplished, according to Paul, salvation for all who put their trust in Jesus (**1:13**). He writes that one can approach God with freedom and confidence "in him and through faith in him (**3:11**).

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[1] For a detailed study of the subject of instrumental music, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music" [ON-LINE]. Available from http: www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL

STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[2] For a detailed study of the subject of the "one Faith" "see Dallas Burdette, "One Faith" [ON-LINE]. Available from http:www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[3] For a detailed study of the subject of unfruitful works of darkness, see Dallas Burdette, "Unfruitful Works of Darkness" [ON-LINE]. Available from http:www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 28 June 2002], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and under the caption NEW TESTAMENT and then under the subheading EPHESIANS.

[4] Henry A. Virkler, *A Christian's Guide to Critical Thinking* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 90. See also Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) for an excellent treatment of how to read in context.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 32.

[7] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

[8] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Baker, 2000), 57.

Overview of the Book of Galatians

Thrust Statement: **Paul charges the churches of Galatia not to preach another way of justification before God other than faith in Jesus the Messiah.**

Scripture Reading: **Galatians 1:6-9.**

INTRODUCTION

This essay is designed to assist individuals in recapturing the very heart of the Gospel of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ, there is controversy over grace versus works. Many within this movement are trying to swing back to a more biblical stance concerning justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Just a casual look at the various journals from a number of camps within this once united movement reveals the turmoil that exists. In spite of Christ's prayer for unity, this fragmented movement is divided into at least twenty-five feuding splinter groups. There are many leaders within the various shattered divisions that are reexamining the traditional interpretation handed down during the last two hundred years. Many within the Stone/Campbell Movement are trying to call individuals back to a proper understanding of the Gospel of Christ.

This paper is not designed to castigate individuals within the Churches of Christ or Christian Churches, because many are seeking to correct the current mistreatment of **Galatians 1;6-9**, as well as many other abused Scriptures. The problems that presently exist within many Churches of Christ are a lack of understanding as to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. One of the most often cited Scriptures is **Galatians 1:6-9**. Many well-meaning leaders today give justification for their separation from other sincere believers by citing this Scripture. Yet, there are others within this movement who are trying to call attention to the context for a proper understanding of the Gospel. Just as Paul had to deal with specifics in his dealing with

the Judaizers, so, I, too, must deal with the misapplication of certain Scriptures that Christians have taken out of context to justify their chastisement and separation from other Christians.

Since I have spent most of my ministry (fifty-two years) in this movement, I am well qualified to write on this subject. I spent approximately seventeen years in the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. After my excommunication for refusing to reject Christians who thought it was okay to have individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper and Bible study classes, I identified myself with another segment of the Stone/Campbell Movement. I soon discovered that the movement started by Barton Stone and Thomas and Alexander Campbell was/is divided into twenty-five or more distinctive religious societies. Many within the various fellowships accused the others of preaching another gospel.

This paper is written primarily to assist Christians in the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ to go back to the biblical text and to reexamine the context before building a theology on an isolated passage; generally, the current interpretation of this now famous quotation promotes division and hatred among God's people. One of the greatest errors that Christians encounter today is the common practice of citing Scriptures in isolation from their context. This is commonly known as proof-texting. This essay looks at **Galatians 1:6-9** in order to determine what the Gospel of Christ is all about. This composition is also written to give assistance to those who are seeking to bring about a correct understanding of the Gospel who still remain in one of the splintered groups, which he/she normally had nothing to do in the genesis, or origin, of its birth. In fact, most of us have inherited our heritage from our religious training. Even though I am dealing with individuals within the Stone/Campbell Movement, I am conscious that many leaders within this alliance are endeavoring to bring about a change, just as I am, in understanding concerning a proper comprehension of the Gospel of Christ and also to correct the current practice of dividing every time there is a difference of opinion.

Orthodoxy Versus God's Gospel

As one seeks to understand the Book of Galatians, one must come to grips with one's orthodoxy. Does one's orthodoxy set aside God's grace? Many Christians will readily admit that one must not allow one's orthodoxy to set aside God's grace, but, at the same time, one quickly discovers that this is the case among many Christians. The Judaizers had a different set of agendas from the modern church today. The religious leaders added circumcision and the keeping of the Law as prerequisites to salvation. On the other hand, numerous Christians, today, have added their own orthodoxy to faith in order for one to inherit eternal life. Christians, as a whole, can understand Paul's reaction to circumcision as a condition of salvation. For the religious leaders, it was faith plus works. Today, it is faith plus one's interpretation of the Scriptures. For some, it is faith plus a cappella singing—instrumental music is sinful; for others, it is faith plus one-cup in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper—individuals cups are condemned; for a few, it is faith plus pinching the bread in the observance of the Lord's Supper—one cannot break the bread; for another segment within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus no kitchens in the church building; for a small majority, it is faith plus the King James Version only—other

translations are anathema; still for others, it is faith plus grape juice in the Lord's Supper—wine cannot be used; for a smaller number, it is faith plus the head covering for women; and even for a smaller number, it is faith plus long hair on women—women cannot even cut the dead ends off their hair. For a few, it is faith plus a refusal to assist from the church treasury the support of an evangelist through another local church—support must be given directly to the minister, and so on.

All of the above oddities advanced by many Christians are associated with the Gospel. The Gospel, for many Christians, is identified as the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Then, this concept of the Gospel boils down to one's interpretation of the twenty-seven books. If one differs from a particular warring faction within the splintered Churches of Christ, then each isolated group accuses the other of preaching another Gospel. Just a perusal of some of the religious journals within the Churches of Christ reveals that the Churches of Christ as a whole are preaching another Gospel. For many Christians, the Gospel is defined as faith plus my interpretation of the Scriptures.

If Christians are to avoid nullifying God's grace, one must understand what the Gospel of God is all about. In order for one to preach the Gospel, one must first understand what the Gospel is. This essay is designed to explore Paul's own definition of the Gospel. What is the Gospel? The answer to this question is found in **Galatians 1:4**. In **1:11**, Paul labors the point as to what the Gospel is not. It is not something that man made up. Paul, in the first chapter of Galatians, states clearly that the Gospel he preached had to do with God's Son (**1:16**). Paul objects to man's substitution of tradition plus the Gospel for salvation (**2:3; 2:6**). As one seeks to understand Galatians, one needs to compare the tradition of circumcision to the traditions found within many Churches of Christ. Numerous Christians have substituted their oddities in pattern theology in place of circumcision. Churches today are adding to God's plan of salvation by faith in the same sense that the Judaizers did concerning circumcision. Just as Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship from the Gentiles prevented Peter from walking in harmony with the truth of the Gospel, so today, one's withdrawal from table fellowship from other Christians who do not subscribe to his/her brand of orthodoxy also fail to walk in harmony with the truth of the Gospel.

BACKGROUND OF GALATIANS

The churches to which Paul wrote this Epistle were founded during his first missionary journey (see **Acts 13** and **14**). This Epistle to the churches in the province of Galatia was probably written about 48 CE (Common Era), the earliest of Paul's letters. This letter reveals that certain Jewish Christians, who wanted to bind certain Old Testament rites as essential to salvation, especially circumcision, had infiltrated the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul's adversaries had perverted the Gospel of Christ by adding additional requirements for justification. As a result of the actions of certain men, Paul sets forth a vigorous apologetic for justification by faith in Jesus alone, that is to say, nothing less and nothing more.

Countless Christians today read this Epistle without any consciousness that they too violate the Gospel of Christ just as the Judaizers did in Paul's day. Just a few years ago, several preachers tried to get me thrown out of a Christian university for my stance that the Gospel of Christ is not twenty-seven books called the New Testament.

In fact, these men were, in essence, preaching another gospel, that is, another way of justification other than by faith. When I began my ministry back in January 1951, I, too, taught another way of salvation, namely, salvation by works. Essentially then, according to my insight, the Gospel of Christ had to do with crossing every "t" and dotting every "i" according to the party creed, otherwise one was preaching another gospel. In the first fifteen years of my ministry, I don't ever recall having heard a message on grace or justification by faith, which included my own preaching.

If one employed instrumental music in the praise service, then that fellowship was preaching another gospel. If one used individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, then this one was preaching another gospel. If anyone taught anything that my meticulous fellowship disagreed with, then the others were preaching another gospel. But after my excommunication from this fellowship, I identified with a congregation that employed individual communion cups and Sunday school. What I soon discovered was that they too utilized **Galatians 1:6-9** to clobber everyone who refused to kowtow to their particular brand of orthodoxy. They just had a different set of agendas. Today, the narrow fellowship that I labored with in the beginning of my ministry (1951) is divided into several offshoots. But this same mentality, as a whole, is also true within the other fellowships. Why so many splinter groups among these believers? None can agree on what the Gospel of Christ is.

There is little difference today within many congregations from the Judaizers in Paul's day. Christians today, as well as then, are divided over how a man is put in a right relationship with God—by works or by faith. A part of the confusion has come about as a result of the piece-meal hermeneutics that is so prevalent among numerous Christians. In other words, scores of Christians practice proof-texting instead of reading the book as a book for its flow of thoughts and teachings. The Gospel of Christ is as much an enigma today as it was to the Christian Judaizers. This confusion is as a result of numerous leaders within the Christian community who refuse to go back to the drawing board, so to speak, and to reexamine the traditions handed down by the forefathers within their distinctive society.

Some within the Churches of Christ have gone back to the text, but they have received tremendous opposition. There are scores of preachers and elders in my own hometown (Montgomery, AL) who have suffered attack for their stand on grace and fellowship with other believers. This castigation is generated within the various fellowships of the splinter groups that are also associated with the denominational Churches of Christ. This change of mind is true throughout numerous Churches of Christ, not just in Montgomery, AL. Hopefully, this brief overview of the Book of Galatians will assist every individual in his/her understanding more clearly what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Is Not Rituals

If one is going to define the word *gospel* in the Book of Galatians, one must look to the book itself in order to arrive at a clear and precise definition. In order for one to read things out of the Book of Galatians and not read one's own agenda into it,

one must always examine context. To illustrate how I, in my earlier ministry, read into the text instead of out of the text, I will examine **Galatians 1:6-9** in light of its immediate context. This one unit of Scripture is one that I memorized as a boy preacher. In my ignorance of this pericope (division or section of Scripture), I, in actuality, zeroed in on preaching another gospel. The same is still true today in almost every unique body of believers. Even today, many of these devout Christians invariably substitute one law for another law. For many Christians, Christianity is based upon a correct application of the so-called new law or regulative principle of worship, that is to say, five so-called acts of worship, which is also called pattern theology within some movements associated with the Stone/Campbell Movement, which law is more stringent than the Law of Moses; at least, this is the interpretation according to some expositors.

The so-called "law of Christ" in **Galatians 6:2** is generally identified, at least with some Christians, with one's own brand of orthodoxy, that is to say, one's interpretation of the Scriptures regarding the so-called five acts of worship, not the law of love. **Galatians 6:2**, like **Galatians 1:6-9**, is interpreted by many sincere Christians with smuggled prejudices from inherited traditions. As a result of this looseness of interpretation, the flames of prejudice have burned into the hearts of men and women for the last two hundred years beginning with the Stone/Campbell Movement. Out of the Stone/Campbell Movement originated three separate religious bodies: Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ. And from the Churches of Christ came another twenty-five or more idiosyncratic or unique fellowships.

Almost everyone within the various religious bodies that grew out of this particular movement that had its original focus on uniting Christians in all the assorted sects in Christendom have heard these verses (**1:6-9**) cited to give credence to the rejection of other believers on the pretense that they were preaching another gospel if they violated the traditional understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Again, the problem of how to be faithful to the Gospel arose over the correct interpretation of the five acts of worship, which, supposedly, God prescribed. Churches divided over numerous issues and each eccentric fellowship accused the other exclusive society of preaching another gospel. To some believers, the five acts is in essence the same as the gospel that Paul writes about in **Galatians 1:6-9**. Why am I concerned about what is going on within the various divisions within the Churches of Christ? I am dealing with the Gospel. When one perverts the Gospel of Christ, one is treading on dangerous ground. The nature of the gospel was of such importance in the scheme of redemption that Paul even warned the Galatians that even if an angel preached another gospel than the one he preached, they should let even the angel be accursed. Listen to Paul as he writes:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again:

If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (**Galatians 1:6-9**)![1]

If one wishes to grasp the Gospel that Paul preached, one should consult the entire Book of Galatians in order to get a feel for the authentic nature of the Gospel of Christ. If something does not make sense, one should immediately consult the context. The context actually defines **Galatians 1:6-9**. One should, without delay, check with the words of Paul in **1:4** if he or she wishes to understand what the Gospel is that Paul proclaimed. In this verse, he goes right to the very heart of the Gospel; he takes the time to explain what the Gospel is all about before he warns the Galatians about the danger of preaching another gospel. Paul starts this Epistle with a ready definition of the Gospel. One should concentrate vigilantly to his explanation as he seeks to capture the very essence of the Gospel:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Galatians 1:3-5**).

As one cautiously reads **verse four**, one must ask certain questions: (1) what is the Gospel? and (2) what is the Gospel of God about? In response to the first question, one can quickly say that the answer is Jesus. In reply to the second question, one can say that the Gospel deals with God's methodology of redemption, namely, Jesus. Yes, the Gospel is about the One who gave Himself for the sins of sinful humanity in order to rescue the fallen race from damnation. It is about what Jesus did in His atonement, not what man does. One can also say that this Gospel details that one's justification before God can only be through faith in His Son, not works.

CHAPTER ONE

The Gospel Is Jesus

Immediately following his explanation of the Gospel (**1:4**), he then warns the Galatians that if any man proclaims another way of salvation other than through faith in Jesus, one should let that individual be "eternally condemned" (**1:8**). After that, in the next pericope (**1:11-24**), he informs the Galatians that the Gospel he proclaimed did not come from man.

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. [12] I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (**1:11-12**).

Paul introduces his proclamation as something that did not originate with man, but rather with Jesus Christ. Identification of the Gospel that Paul preached (**1:11**) is essential to a correct understanding of the Gospel that he speaks of in **1:6-9**. What did he preach? He preached Jesus. Listen to him as he reveals the substance of his preaching:

But when God, who set me apart from birth [a] and called me by his grace, was pleased [16] to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man (**1:15-16**).

The Gospel that Paul speaks of in **1:6-9** has to do with the preaching of Jesus, not man-made rituals, rituals of the Law of Moses, or even the Law itself. The Gospel has to do with preaching Jesus as God's way of salvation. Even today, many Christians still do not understand the Gospel that Paul preached. It is not uncommon, as stated above, for certain Christians to identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. To add something to the Gospel as a condition of salvation is to destroy the very idea of grace. For one to add to the Gospel of God's grace is to nullify grace.

Many Christians, unknowingly, have nullified God's grace through their philosophy of "pattern theology," that is, five prescribed rituals to be performed on Sunday morning between the hours of 9am to 10am. It is not just five prescribed rituals that nullify the Gospel, but the insistence that these five rituals must be performed in a prescribed way in order for one to have salvation. Thus, the Gospel of Christ is turned into another law that is more stringent than even the Law of Moses. For example, the Gospel, at least to some Christians, is reflected in the following beliefs:

- Acappella singing versus instrumental accompaniment
- Church name (Church of Christ)
- One cup in the distribution of the Lord's Supper (The one-cup movement will not fellowship Christians who employ individual cups in the Lord's Supper.)
- No Sunday school (This movement advances the idea that one cannot teach the Bible in classes on Sunday morning—must be taught in one assembly on Sunday morning.)
- Bible colleges (supported by congregations)
- Grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper
- Break bread or pinch bread in the Lord's Supper
- Kitchen in the church building
- Orphan homes (supported by congregations)
- Church contributions (cannot be distributed to individuals that are not members of the church)

Unfortunately, as a young preacher boy, I was taught to memorize **Galatians 1:6-9** and then apply these verses to many of the above items. The one who taught me was sincere in his understanding. In my judgment, his misapplication was not rebellion against God, but rather an honest mistake of the heart. Nevertheless, if one

participated in Sunday school (Bible study) on Sunday morning, then this fellowship was preaching "another gospel." If one used an instrument in the congregational singing, then one was preaching "another gospel." If one broke the bread in the Lord's Supper rather than pinch the bread (the bread had to remain one piece—no fragments), then one was accused of preaching "another gospel." On and on this kind of analysis flowed/flows until the body of Christ was/is ripped apart into various warring factions, none could/can agree on what the Gospel was/is about. In the early 70s, I was accused of preaching another gospel when I refused to reject fellowship with Christians who employed individual communion cups and who participated in Sunday school. Thus, this strange fellowship threw me out of the synagogue for so-called unfaithfulness—that is, preaching another gospel.

As one reflects back upon **1:11**—"the gospel I preached"—can one honestly identify the above list of ten items as "the gospel" that Paul preached? Again, what was the "revelation" (**1:12**) he received? Once more, the context is the deciding factor in understanding **1:11-12**. Pay attention once more to Paul in **1:16** as he explains what it was that he preached: "to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Again, one can hardly read **1:16** without a consciousness of **1:4**: "Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age."

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL OPPOSES PETER FOR HYPOCRISY

The Truth of the Gospel

When one adds another condition to salvation other than faith in Jesus, one preaches another gospel. Prior to Paul's confrontation with Peter over how an individual is put in a right relationship with God, he states that three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem to see Peter (**1:18**). It was fourteen years later that he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem (**2:1**). This time he went in response to a revelation that he received in order to "set before them the gospel" that "he preached among the Gentiles" (**2:2**). The question of circumcision and the keeping of the Law had infiltrated the fellowship of believers. Paul, along with Barnabas and Titus, went privately to the leaders in order to try to prevent this trip from ending in confusion as to the true nature of the Gospel that Paul preached to the Gentiles and that Peter preached to the Jews (**2:2-4**). Paul states emphatically that the leaders did not compel Titus to be circumcised (**2:3**). Yet, there were certain brothers who wanted to insist upon circumcision as a condition of salvation (**2:4**; see also **Acts 15:1-2**).

Paul refused to back down on the issue of adding another condition to salvation other than faith in the Son of God: "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (**Galatians 2:5**). The leaders saw that the Gospel had been entrusted to Paul to preach to the Gentiles and that the Gospel had been entrusted to Peter to preach to the Jews (**2:7**). When one adds something to faith in Christ as a condition of salvation, then one must stand up for the "mystery" of God that had been hidden from ages past in order that "the truth of the gospel" might not be nullified. Later, Paul confronted Peter for his actions in withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles when certain men came from James (**2:11-12**). This withdrawal from the

Gentiles created such confusion that "even Barnabas was led astray" (**2:13**). How did Paul react under such circumstances when "the truth of the gospel" was at stake? Paul expresses his reaction this way:

> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs (**2:14**)?

A brief summary of what has been pointed out thus far is necessary in order for one not to forget the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning the true nature of the Gospel of Christ. In **1:4**, Paul gives the essence of the Gospel—"Who gave himself for our sins." Then in **2:11**, he reveals his desire to make known the gospel he preached. But in **2:16**, he reveals the Gospel as Jesus. In **2:2**, he sets before the leaders the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. After his encounter with certain men who came from James who wanted to add circumcision as a condition of salvation, he objected in order that "the truth of the gospel might remain" (**2:4-5**). Then later Paul had to rebuke Peter, along with others, for their adulterating the "truth of the gospel" with their withdrawal from the Gentiles (**2:12-13**). Once more, he captures their departure as not in harmony with the "truth of the gospel" (**2:14**). Paul did not rebuke Peter for preaching another gospel, but rather he rebuked him for his actions that were not in harmony with the very nature of the Good News concerning God's way of salvation—faith in Jesus.

The Truth of the Gospel Equals Justification by Faith

Just as Paul sets forth the nature of the Gospel in **1:4**, he now goes right to the very heart of the Gospel in **2:15-16**:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Just as the word *mystery* filled the Book of Ephesians, so the word *faith* flashes like neon lights across the Book of Galatians. The word *faith* is the key to grasping what the Gospel of God is all about. It is about God's way of redeeming sinful humanity—through faith in His Son Jesus. God only has one way of salvation—faith in Jesus. The words "faith in Jesus Christ" and "justified by faith in Christ" set the tone for the rest of the Book as Paul seeks to explain the nature of the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, God's way of justification. One can never be justified through observing law, or law keeping.

Paul drives home this point throughout this short Epistle. No one, writes Paul, can be justified through observing the Law (**2:16**). Again, the question that confronts everyone is: How does one live? Paul explains his own life by saying, "I live by faith in the Son of God" (**2:20**). Justification is "by faith." But faith has for its object, Jesus. It is "by faith in Jesus Christ" and "justified by faith in Christ." **Galatians 2:20** should

call forth Paul's words in **Ephesians 4:5**: "one Lord, one faith." The Gospel justifies those whom the Law condemns. Faith attributes salvation entirely to Christ, which eliminates works—works of any kind.

If righteousness could be obtained through law keeping, then Christ, according to Paul, "died for nothing" (**Galatians 2:21b**). When one seeks justification through rituals and regulations, regardless as to how good and beneficial, one sets aside the grace of God (**2:21a**). Having said this, Paul discusses the Spirit that God gave to the ones who responded to Jesus through faith. Leon Morris makes the point, and correctly so, that "no ritual act availed before God was central to the gospel he (Paul) preached and by which he lived. He preached Christ crucified, not circumcision."[2]

Once more, Morris cuts away all the underbrush that men have added to salvation: "The Message about the cross means that people can do nothing to bring about their salvation, nothing at all. It insists that Christ has done all that is necessary by laying down his life in place of sinners."[3] It is not uncommon for numerous Christians within the Churches of Christ to pass off the religious customs (traditions) from the church fathers as the Gospel of God. In other words, many Christians still confuse ritual prescriptions and religious requirements of oral tradition as the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, the Gospel that Paul preached. Christians must abandon their so-called five acts of worship as a prerequisite to salvation. It is not uncommon for many—not all--within the Churches of Christ to advance a notion of salvation through perfect obedience to the so-called new law concerning a worship service. Around this worship service, the five acts must be performed in a prescribed manner; otherwise, one is on his/her way to hell. For many, the right performance plus faith merits salvation, not faith alone.

When Peter and the others were not walking in line with the "truth of the Gospel" (**2:14**), Paul stepped in to stop the movement away from the very heart of the Gospel he preached. What is the "truth of the gospel"? It is justification by faith in Christ (**2:16**), pure and simple. Unless one grasps this concept, there can never be unity among God's divided people, not just Church of Christ folk. As Ronald Y. K. Fung expresses it: "The truth of the gospel was none other than justification by faith in Christ alone and not by works of the law—a principle which applied to Jew and Gentile alike and hence was the basis of the Church's unity."[4]

CHAPTER THREE

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Paul questions the Galatians about how they received the Holy Spirit. He asked: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" (**3:2**). How did they receive the Holy Spirit? It is obvious that they received the Holy Spirit after they believed the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Salvation can never be through human efforts. Paul cuts away all underbrush concerning salvation when he writes: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (**3:3**).

Paul employs repetition as a means of calling attention to the very heart of the Gospel. In **verse three**, he informed the Galatians that they received the Spirit by believing what they heard (**3:2-3**). Now, once more, he calls attention to the Holy Spirit as a gift: "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (**3:5**). Again, it is law versus faith. In order to reinforce his arguments, he introduces Abraham and his faith. Over again, one observes the word *believed* as Paul develops the means of receiving the righteousness that belongs to God. He writes:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**3:6-9**).

One can hardly read this pericope (unit or section) without cognition of the word *faith* as employed by Paul. The following expressions utilized by Paul stands out, as it were, in bold neon lights: "He believed," "those who believe," "justify the Gentiles by faith," "those who have faith," and "Abraham, the man of faith." Since "The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith," Paul writes that God "announced the gospel in advance to Abraham." The context lays emphasis, not on Abraham's faithfulness, but on Abraham's faith. The Gospel announced in advance to Abraham is the Gospel that Paul announces in **1:4** and, at the same time, cautions one about preaching another way of salvation other than that which Jesus offers to anyone who believes in Him (see also **John 3:14-18**, **36**; **5:24**; **6:29**, **40**, **47**).

Paul places a curse upon anyone who preaches another way of justification before God other than "faith" in Jesus the Son of God" (**1:6-9**). Paul stresses that salvation can never be through "human effort," but only through faith in Jesus the Savior of the world (**3:3**, **11**, **14**). One must question the substance of what was announced to Abraham in advance in order to clearly see the positive aspects of the Gospel of Christ. What was announced to Abraham in advance? Yes, the Gospel was announced in advance. What is the Gospel? As stated above, many identify the Gospel with their particular brand of orthodoxy. In other words, the various denominational Churches of Christ determine their own "human effort" as the means of obtaining salvation, not faith in Jesus. It is always "faith" plus their "interpretation" of isolated Scriptures from their contexts. Why is the Gospel so difficult for some Christians to understand? The answer lies in the hermeneutics (science of interpretation). For example, the hermeneutical method utilized by the various theological factions today determine what **Galatians 1:6-9** should say beforehand in order to support their theological system of aloofness.

Almost any interpretation can be placed upon a verse(s) if the context is ignored. One must first determine the context before application. If one expects to interpret the word *gospel* in Galatians, one must first learn to pay attention to the context—the Book of Galatians. It is not uncommon for the Book of Galatians to be read through the lens of one's own particular warring splinter group. When one encounters an interpretation that does not make sense, then one must go digging for

answers to solve the hermeneutical dilemma. In response to the question above: What was announced in advance to Abraham? If one says that the Gospel is twenty-seven books called the New Testament, then one is confronted with a correct interpretation of this so-called new law book in order for one not to preach "another gospel," for each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement asserts that it, and it alone, is preaching the true gospel. Ultimately, the Gospel of Christ boils down to one's odd interpretation of certain isolated texts from its context.

When one assigns an interpretation of the gospel announced to Abraham with the so-called prescribed five acts of worship, one immediately sees the folly of such an interpretation. Did God announce in advance that the singing in the Christians' community must be a cappella rather than instrumental? Did God announce in advance that the Lord's Supper must be observed with one cup upon the table rather than each person having his/her own cup in the drinking of the Cup of Blessing? Did God announce in advance that in the Lord's Supper one must "pinch" the bread rather than "break" the bread? Did God announce to Abraham that in the time of Christ (2000 years in the future), Christians could not have a kitchen in the church building? Did God announce in advance to Abraham that in the Lord's Supper one must use grape juice rather than wine? This list is almost *ad infinitum*. The various oddities depend on which of the several of militaristic groups that one talks to. Each distinctive society of believers has its own agenda as to what the Gospel of Christ is all about.

Again, one must ask the question: What was announced in advance to Abraham almost two thousand years before the Word became flesh (**John 1:14**)? The answer is that God announced to Abraham His means of justifying sinful humanity, that is to say, faith in Jesus. Jesus is the object of one's faith. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ. Paul states the record very clearly on this point:

> Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."[d] [12] The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."[e] [13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."[f] [14] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**Galatians 3:11-14**).

Once more, one discovers that the word *faith* flashes like neon lights in these words of Paul as he seeks to set forth the very heart of the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham two thousand years earlier. The blessing given to Abraham is available to everyone through Christ Jesus. Thus, it is through faith that one receives the promise of the Spirit (**3:2-3, 14**), not human effort (**3:3**). In order for Paul to nail down his arguments, he says,

> Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. [16] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The

> Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," [a] meaning one person, who is Christ (**3:15-16**).

He did not say as to SEEDS as of many, but rather to SEED, meaning one person, who is Christ. This is the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News of God's way of salvation by faith. This same thought is presented in Paul's words to the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). When one says by "faith alone," one is not falsifying Paul's words to the Ephesians. This phrase only clarifies and emphasizes what Paul clearly says. On the other hand, the Judaizers wanted to make human efforts, in addition to faith in Jesus, the means of salvation, but Paul says NO! Paul, as he concludes his arguments about the Law, writes: "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe" (**Galatians 3:22**).

Paul drives home the point that one's right standing with God is not based upon human efforts, but rather one's standing before God is based upon "faith." Take note once more to Paul as he seeks to nail the coffin shut concerning the place of law in the life of the believer: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. [24] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (**3:23-25**). The following chart sets forth the thrust of the entire Book of Galatians:

Galatians 2:15-16	Galatians 3:23-25
We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.	Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. [24] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ [b] that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Justification by faith in Christ is the Gospel announced in advance to Abraham. Before "the faith" came, the Law held individuals prisoners. The Law was designed to lead one to Christ in order that one might be justified by faith. Paul expresses this same thought in his letter to the Romans:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**Romans 3:19-20**).

When one looks at the Law of God, one cannot open his/her mouth in his/her defense. The Law of God shuts every person's mouth. It is not until one is consciously black-and-blue from the demands of the Law and, at the same time, smitten by the Law of God to the very core of his/her soul that one will turn to the Gospel for the healing of his/her wounds. Until one is seized by and jailed by the Law of God, one will not change direction to Christ for freedom from guilt. Until one is condemned and killed by the Law, one will not call upon Christ for justification.[5]

The Gospel of Christ is the Good News of justification by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. God accomplished redemption for sinful humanity through the cross of Christ. The Book of Galatians is full of the cross of Christ. Without the cross of Christ, one can say that justification of the *unjust* would be *unjustified*. It is through the cross that God rescues humanity from condemnation. God's answer to sin is the cross. What did Christ do upon the Cross? Listen to Paul as he details this information to the Galatians:

Galatians 1:3-5	**Galatians 2:20-21**	**Galatians 3:13-14**
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.	I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!	Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."f 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The only reason that God can justify sinful humanity is that Christ died for the ungodly upon the cruel cross of Calvary. The **Book of Galatians** sets forth, in clear terms, God's means of justification, which is by faith in Jesus. As **chapter three** concludes, Paul again calls attention to how individuals become children of God: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:26**). In **verse twenty-four** of this same chapter, he writes: "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." Then in **verse twenty-two**, Paul pens: "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe." Again, as one, once more peruses **chapter three**, one observes that the word *faith* fills this chapter. Listen to Paul as he expresses how one receives the promise of the Sprit: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (**3:14**).

In **3:26-29**, Paul sets forth "faith" in Christ as that which levels all humanity. The Judaizers could not accept this principle of faith. Even today, many Christians cannot accept the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Nevertheless, Paul drove home the point that Christ secured salvation for all who would put their faith in Him. In other words, Christ has accomplished it all in His curse-bearing death upon the cross (**3:13**). Salvation is through faith in Him. Salvation rests upon the finished work of Christ through His sin-bearing death and His curse-bearing death, which is embraced by faith. Every believer must bear in mind that the source of one's salvation is God; the ground of one's justification is Jesus, and the means of one's justification is by faith. Paul in his Roman epistle sets forth this same understanding. In **chapter 3**, Paul writes:

> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

One should remember that justification is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and through faith alone; it can be no other way. This is what Paul stresses from beginning to end in the Book of Galatians. Biblical faith has Jesus for its object. John R.W. Stott expresses this truth with care and eloquence when he writes: "The value of faith is not to be found in itself, but entirely and exclusively in its object, namely Jesus Christ and him crucified."[6] In the **first three chapters**, Paul covers a period of two thousand years of history. He began with God's promise to Abraham (born: 2166 BCE) concerning his SEED, which is Christ (**3:6-25**). In **Romans Four**, Paul develops this subject in greater detail. In **chapter three of Galatians**, he writes concerning Abraham's faith: "He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (**3:6**).

CHAPTER FOUR

Bondage versus Freedom

4:1-11

In **chapter four**, Paul continues to develop the subject of salvation through faith. In order for one to receive the "full rights of sons" (**4:5**), Jesus came to redeem individuals from the Law (**4:4**). One can only receive the "full rights of sons" through the finished work of Christ upon the cross. One can only appropriate this freedom through faith in Jesus. When one is redeemed from Law, God sends forth the Sprit of His Son into his/her heart. Paul stresses that this giving of the Sprit did not come through Law keeping, but rather through faith (**3:2-5; 4:4-6**). As stated above, in **chapter three**, Paul covers two thousand years of Old Testament history beginning with God's call of Abraham out of Ur of Chaldea. In the **third chapter**, he analyzed three great figures—Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

He calls forth Abraham to show that God promised to bless all nations through his seed. Then he calls attention to the giving of the Law to Moses, which, in and of itself, did not annul the promise God made to Abraham, but, on the other hand, made the coming of Christ more imperative. For Paul, the Law acted as a means of driving

men and women to Him for release from their burdens of sin and guilt. Now, in the **fourth chapter** of **Galatians**, Paul covers once more the past that he dealt with in **chapter three**. In **verses 1-3**, he discusses the condition of men and women under the Law—slavery. Next, in **verses 4-8**, he talks about the situation of men and women in Christ—sons of God. Then, in **verses 9-11**, he bemoans the fact that many were turning back to slavery—enslaved all over again. Stott summarizes these eleven verses by saying, "Once we were slaves. Now we are sons. How, then, can we turn back to the old slavery?"[7]

Many Christians today are exchanging the Gospel of God's grace for good works. Within many churches, the good works are related to the so-called five-step plan of salvation and the so-called five-acts of worship performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner, which usually rules out mechanical instruments in praise to God. The Book of Galatians is as timely today as it was almost two thousand years ago. The orthodoxy of many churches completely obscures the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When one adds his/her own brand of orthodoxy as a condition of salvation, this one adds to the conditions of salvation as much as the Judaizers did that Paul confronted in his Galatian letter. In the biographical information about Paul (**Philippians 3:1-11**), one quickly discovers that Paul was converted from one understanding of righteousness to another—from his own righteousness of works to God's righteousness by faith (see also **Romans 9:30—10:21**)

Paul, in the Book of Galatians, labors the point that there is a difference between a religion of works and a religion of grace. For Paul, there is only one Gospel—justification by faith through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Many, especially those within the various factions of the Churches of Christ, have added their own requirements to the Gospel message. Many believers see religion as keeping certain rules and regulations, not justification by faith in Jesus Christ. When anyone adds something to the Gospel of Christ as a condition of salvation, this one destroys the Gospel of grace. The central truth of the Gospel, as pointed out earlier, concerns the one who gave Himself for our sins (see **Galatians 1:4**).

The essential message of the Gospel is Christ crucified for the sins of humanity. Salvation is available through God's grace alone, and anyone who obscures salvation by faith alone must be opposed. What God has accomplished through the atonement of Christ is the Gospel message of salvation. When one adds his/her beliefs concerning the use of one-cup in the Lord's Supper, a cappella music only, no kitchens in the church building, no Sunday schools, and so on, this one actually nullifies the Gospel of God's grace. When one adds to the Gospel of God's grace, this person is preaching another gospel. The essence of the Gospel is the risen Jesus.

Paul's Concern for the Galatians

4:12-20

Paul expresses his deep concern for the Galatians lack of concern for the freedom they experienced in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Many were "turning back to those weak and miserable principles" that had previously enslaved them (**4:9**). Some of the believers desired to reinstate the ceremonial aspects of the Law as well as the keeping of the Law itself as a condition of salvation (**4:10**; see also **Acts 15:1-5**).

Paul objected to the Judaizers' emphasis upon circumcision and the keeping of the Law as a condition of salvation. Consequently, Paul became an enemy of some within the congregations scattered throughout the province of Galatia because he told them the truth about God's way of salvation—by grace alone and through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. In fact, he writes: "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (**Galatians 4:16**).

Many Christians today are receiving the brunt of ostracism by many other sincere zealous individuals who have never allowed Christ to be formed in them (see also **4:19**). This author, Dallas Burdette, talked at length with one of his second cousins recently (7-30-02) about his having received chastisement from his own typical fellowship for daring to preach on God's grace as the way of salvation. His own fleshly brother who is a deacon in this same fellowship of Christians also came under the wrath of the powers that be. Also, in this same congregation in Texas, another brother (no fleshly relationship) was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. He, too, was told to preach on the issues, that is to say, one-cup, no Sunday school, no instrumental music, and so on. Again, one witnesses many individuals within the one-cup movement that are seeking to recapture the very heart of the Gospel. This effort is quite wide in almost every segment within the Churches of Christ. Many preachers and elders are having great success in this area. Presently, I study with several preachers within the Churches of Christ, and everyone that I study with is preaching grace. Even though I am dealing with the Churches of Christ as a whole, one must never forget that within this movement there is a movement to draw people back to a true understanding of the Gospel.

These three episodes are not isolated events within this very narrow, sectarian group. What were these three men accused of? They were accused of being "grace preachers." In fact, one of these men was called a "false teacher" for preaching on grace. Hopefully, one can understand why the Book of Galatians is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote this forceful letter against the legalist. When congregations do not like the message of grace, the preachers of grace become the enemies of these individuals, or other congregations who do not preach grace as God's way of salvation. Those individuals and congregations who preach grace are blackballed from the so-called loyal churches—party loyalty must be maintained at all cost. This mindset is not just true within this distinctive fellowship, but it is true among other churches out of the Stone/Campbell Movement. In other words, the private theological whims of some preachers become the Gospel of Christ, that is to say, their own subjective doctrinal fancies.

Hagar and Sarah

4:21-31

Paul continues his arguments against the Judaizers in order to try to convince those reverting back to Judaism to think about what they are doing. Paul discusses Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem in order to drive home his message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (see also **2:16; 3:11**). This pericope is addressed to those "who want to be under the law" (**4:21**). The Judaizers wanted to turn the Gospel of God's grace into law. They, like so many Christians today, advanced the notion that strict adherence to regulations, to traditions, and to

ceremonies is what puts one in a right relationship with God. In other words, salvation is not based on faith alone in Jesus, but rather upon one's correctly adhering to the proper performance of certain works as defined by the religious leaders. For Paul, anyone who lives under law is under condemnation—and I might add that this is true of any law, not just the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses pointed individuals to the One who would bring salvation.

The Historical: Abraham

4:22-23

In this section of Scripture (**4:21-31**), Paul calls forth the historical (**4:22-23**), the allegorical/typological (**4:24-27**), and the personal (**4:28-31**) to illustrate beyond doubt the true nature of the Gospel he originally set forth on his first missionary tour (see also **4:13; Acts 13:1—14:28**). Paul, like John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:7-12**), calls attention to the fact that true descent from Abraham is not physical but spiritual (**Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4:16**). The following chart sets forth in parallel columns the misunderstanding of the religious leaders perception of salvation as well as the correct interpretation of the data in the **Book of Genesis** and **Galatians** concerning Abraham as the father of the faithful:

Matthew 3:9	**Galatians 3:29**
And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.	If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Both John the Baptist and Paul zero in on the true seed of Abraham. The historical element of **chapter 4** (**vv. 22-23**) is also illustrated in **chapter 3**. One should read these two verses with the comprehension that Paul is endeavoring to bolster his claim that justification is by faith alone. Earlier, in **chapter 3**, Paul elaborates on what John the Baptist implied in his message about the true nature of Abraham's seed and what Jesus specifically asserted in His confrontation with the Jews (**John 8:31-34**). Paul puts forth the point that the blessing God promised to Abraham comes not upon the Jews through natural descent, but upon all who believe—whether Jews or Gentiles. Paul writes: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (**3:14**). In Paul's letter to Rome, he writes about one who is and who is not a true Jew:

> A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. [29] No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God (**Romans 3:28-29**).

Paul illustrates his argument about the true seed of Abraham by calling attention to two of Abraham's sons. He writes:

> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. [23] His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise (**4:22-23**).

Paul draws two important distinctions between these two brothers—Ishmael and Isaac. Even though both boys had the same father, they did not have the same mother. The boys took after their mothers. Since Hagar was a slave, Ishmael was born into slavery. On the other hand, Sara was free; therefore, Isaac was born into freedom. Stott correctly says that "Isaac was not born according to nature, but rather against nature. . . . Ishmael was born according to nature, but Isaac against nature, supernaturally, through an exceptional promise of God."[8]

Thus, Paul emphasizes that everyone is either slave or free. If one is in Christ, he/she is no longer a slave but free. God's grace sets one free without the deeds of the Law. If one is a Christian, one has been born not of natural means, but rather one is born again through supernatural means. One can hardly reflect upon Paul's argument concerning justification without recalling what he said earlier in this same epistle: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (**3:8-9**).

The Allegory (Figurative/Typological): Hagar and Sarah

4: 24-27

Just as Ishmael and Isaac represent spiritual truth concerning slavery and freedom, so also Hagar and Sarah stand for two covenants. Hagar represents the Old Covenant, whereas Sarah represents the New Covenant. Yet, in the allegory/typology, one discovers that Paul paints another picture. These two women not only represent two covenants, but they also represent two Jerusalems, the earthly and the heavenly. Again, one should turn to Paul's arguments and listen attentively to him as he develops his arguments to uphold his thesis that one is justified by faith, not by the deeds of the Law. Again, his arguments go back to Abraham, the one justified through faith:

> These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. [25] Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. [27] For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." (**4:24-27**).

Hagar, according to Paul's arguments, represents "Mount Sinai," and Sara represents the new "Jerusalem that is above." This New Jerusalem is our mother, not Mount Sinai, which represents slavery. This section by Paul is written in order to give historical testimony to his principle of justification by faith. Thus, he goes back two thousand years to God's covenant with Abraham to give greater force to his arguments concerning justification by faith. Paul is not advancing a new theology, but rather he is setting forth Abraham as one who was justified by faith alone, without circumcision or works of the Law. Stott captures the very essence of Paul's position when he writes:

> This, then, is the allegory. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, born of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, who represent two covenants and two Jerusalems. Hagar the slave stands for the old covenant, and her son Ishmael symbolizes the church of the earthly Jerusalem. Sarah the free woman stands for the new covenant and her son Isaac symbolizes the church of the heavenly Jerusalem. Although superficially similar, because both were sons of Abraham, the two boys were fundamentally different. In the same way, Paul is arguing, it is not enough to claim Abraham as our father. The crucial question concerns who our mother is. If it is Hagar, we are like Ishmael, but if it is Sarah, we are like Isaac.[9]

Just as many Jews failed to understand that legal bondage and spiritual freedom cannot co-exist, one must go. Thus, when Paul and others addressed the issue of freedom in Christ or freedom from the Law of Moses, this teaching created turmoil and resulted in the Jews waging a war against Christians. A religion of regulations, as existed among the Jews, could not continue to exist if the set of laws were not strictly enforced. Today, legalistic bondage, within many local congregations of the Churches of Christ, also persecutes those who dare to disagree with the status quo. The status quo must be maintained at all cost. This mental concept of bondage is the very reason that so many churches are hopelessly divided into warring factions. What is the answer to our divisions? Until Christians understand that faith in Jesus is the unifying factor, there will never be unity within this Movement that started out as a movement to unite Christians in all the sects. If Christians want unity, then grace and love must permeate the lives of every believer. Morris has captured the very heart of grace: "When grace is central, the person has made love his dominant principle . . . it will be the power of that love and not the constraint of law that keeps us right, and love is always more powerful than law."[10]

Personal Application: Isaac Versus Ishmael

4:28-31

Paul turns, as it were, from Sarah and Hagar to the two boys—Isaac and Ishmael. Even though both boys were born of natural birth, nevertheless, one of the boys (Isaac) was born by the "power of the Spirit," not in the "ordinary way" (**4:29**). Sarah was ninety years old when she became pregnant (**Genesis 17:17**). If one wishes to share in the inheritance, one can only share in this blessing through the "free woman" (**4:30**). Paul's argument is that if one is a Christian, this one is like Isaac, not Ishmael. In other words, Christians are sons through supernatural means, not natural

means. To express this truth differently, the words of John are appropriate to express this same truth:

> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:10-13**).

It is in this same vein that Paul in the **fourth chapter of Romans** also sets forth the means of Abraham's justification before God. Paul says, "What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (**4:3**). Again, Paul writes: "The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all" (**4:16**). Is it any wonder that Paul addresses the subject of faith in Galatians prior to his illustrations concerning Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael? Listen to Paul as he seeks to nail down the means of one's justification:

> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27] for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (**Galatians 3:26-29**).

Even before the foundation of the earth, it had always been God's plan to justify His creatures through faith in His Son Jesus Christ (see **Ephesians 1:3-14; Genesis 3:15**), not works.

CHAPTER 5

Stand Firm in the Freedom of Christ

5:1-12

Paul wants the Galatians to stand firm in the freedom that Christ obtains for everyone who puts his/her trust in Him. It is not so much freedom from sin that Paul discusses, but rather it is freedom from the dominion of the Law that keeps one under bondage and condemnation. The freedom that Paul advances is gained only "in" and "through" Christ. Earlier, Paul writes:

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." [14] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**3:13-14**).

Stott, once more, focuses in on the very essence of Christianity when he cuts away all the underbrush by writing: "Christianity is freedom, not bondage. Christ has set us free; so we must stand firm in our freedom."[11] The slogan of the Judaizers was: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." (**Acts 15:2**). The false teachers advanced the notion that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. The religious leaders (party of the Pharisees) from Jerusalem added to God's scheme of justification: "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses" (**15:5**). In other words, the Pharisees were saying that Moses must finish what Christ set out to accomplish through His atonement. His death upon the cross was not sufficient for salvation. It could not possibly be by faith, so they thought.

Many Christians today read the Book of Galatians, but they cannot make the book relevant to today's society. Instead of circumcision and observance of the Law of Moses, a number of factions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have developed their own category of laws that must be adhered to in order to obtain salvation. In other words, salvation is by faith plus their interpretation of the five acts of worship. Some say you cannot be saved unless you drink out of one cup in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Yet, others advance the notion that one cannot be saved if he or she participates in the modern day Sunday school. Others make their oddities concerning kitchens in the church building and the dispensing of the monies collected on Sunday morning a condition of salvation. Some even go so far as to say that one cannot be saved if one uses an instrument in the singing in the assembly.

Just a short time ago (7-31-02), this author (Dallas Burdette) talked with a brother from a non-institutional fellowship of believers (Church of Christ). He related to me that the preacher before him was fired for being a "grace preacher." Another brother from the one cup and non-Sunday school fellowship informed me that he was called on the carpet for preaching too much about Jesus. In this same fellowship, a brother recently related to me that he was called a false teacher for preaching on grace. Another very devout Christian was also defrocked for not preaching on the issues; he was accused of not being balanced by preaching on grace. In almost all of these groups, salvation is presented as faith in Christ plus acceptance of their oddities in interpretation. For many Christians, faith in Christ is not sufficient to merit salvation—one must be correct on all doctrinal issues advanced by their own unique fellowship. But Paul reacts to this type philosophy concerning salvation. What does he say? Listen to him as he zeros in on this sort of mindset:

> It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. 2 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (**5:1-5**).

Christ has set every individual free who looks to Him for redemption. Anyone who thinks that the finished work of Christ upon the cross is not sufficient for salvation and seeks justification through law, this person, says Paul, has fallen from Grace. One does not work for salvation. **Galatians 5:1-5** is quite clear as to how one receives righteousness. In this section of Scripture, Paul states two things about faith. First, he states that by faith one eagerly awaits the righteousness that is through the Spirit, and second, that what really matters is faith in Christ—a faith that expresses itself through love. In **verse six**, Paul is not saying that "works" of love are added as a condition of salvation, but rather, the faith that saves is a faith that issues in love. Paul stresses in this section (**5:1-5**), as well as the Book as a whole, that salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

In my fifty-two years of ministry, I have discovered that the greatest enemies of the faith are not unbelievers, but believers. I witness almost daily the persecution of Christians who are free by the people who desire to remain under bondage. Many within these distinctive churches are brutal in their attack against anyone who advances that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. Just as the religious people opposed Paul, so today, many religious leaders still persecute anyone who dares to teach what the Book of Galatians espouses—justification by faith. It is in Christ alone that one can inherit the promises. Many Christians still fail to understand that the salvation that Paul preached was a salvation by grace through faith. One must put his/her trust in God through Jesus Christ. For it is only in Him that one can one inherit God's promises and receive God's grace and obtain freedom from God's wrath. In the words of Morris, "justification can come about only because of what Christ has done. Therefore to seek it by *law* is to reject God's way of justification."[12]

Freedom from Christ: Not a License for Sinful Behavior

5:13-25

It is not works of law that counts with God, but rather a "faith that expresses itself through love" (**5:6**). Christians are not to use their freedom in Christ as justification for fulfilling the desires of the flesh (**5:13**). One's freedom in Christ should never be used as a pretext for self-indulgence. In the words of Stott: "Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, not freedom *to* sin."[13] Paul, after listing numerous works of the flesh, reminds the believers in the various congregations in the province of Galatia: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (**5:24**). In this section, Paul, instead of dealing with theology (justification by faith), focuses in on ethical behavior that results from obedience to the Gospel, that is to say, trust in Jesus as God's way of salvation. William Barclay's comments on Christian freedom and ethical behavior are to the point. He writes with conciseness in this regard:

> His theology always ran one danger. When he declared that the end of the reign of law had come and that the reign of grace had arrived, it was always possible for someone to say, "That, then, means that I can do what I like; all the restraints are lifted and I can follow my inclinations wherever they lead me. Law is gone and grace ensures forgiveness anyway." But to the end of the day there remained for Paul two obligations. (i) One he does not mention

here but it is implicit in all his thinking. It is *the obligation to God*. If God loved us like that then the love of Christ constrains us. I cannot soil a life which God paid for with his own life. (ii) There is the *obligation to our fellow men*. We are free, but our freedom loves its neighbour as itself.[14]

Unfortunately, today many Christians still put forward the same questions to individuals that the religious leaders presented to Paul concerning grace and sin. Christians, nowadays, as well as in Paul's day, still feel that salvation by grace alone will lead to a life that is totally void of good works. In other words, the doctrine of grace will open the floodgates to ungodly behavior. But is this so? Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, also calls attention to the same mental philosophy of fear concerning his teaching on grace that is so prevalent among Christians who want to deny salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Listen to him as he sets up a scenario that some seem to have fostered:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, [a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (**Romans 6:1-7**).

Paul stresses the fact that Christians are no longer "slaves to sin." Believers have changed masters—from Satan to Christ. When one is in Christ, his/her freedom is a different type freedom; it is a freedom to serve Christ, not sin. Christians do not seek to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (**5:16**), but rather, every saint of God who seeks to be "led by the Spirit" (**5:18**) will deny himself or herself "the acts of the sinful nature" (**5:19**) It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Romans:

> 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:15-18**).

The Christians at Rome obeyed wholeheartedly the teachings of Jesus. An example of the teachings of Jesus can be found in His Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5—7**), as well as the Book of Romans. Many Christians refer to the "form of

teaching" (**Romans 6:17**) to baptism, but the context seems to indicate that Paul is discussing ethical behavior, not baptism. Even when one abstains from the works of the flesh, he or she still does not merit salvation. Paul discusses this concept of grace versus merit also to the Ephesians:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

Christians do "good works," not to earn salvation, but they do "good works" out of gratitude for God's gracious love. In Paul's epistle to Titus, he calls attention to pre-conversion behavior among those who had previously responded to God's grace. Prior to their conversion to Christ, he addresses their unscrupulous conduct as: "enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures" (**Titus 3:3**). But this kind of unethical behavior is no longer true with their conversion state. Once more, one should read carefully the words of Paul as he captures the essence of the new behavior resulting from conversion:

> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. [4] But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. [8] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**3:3-8**).

Christians are called upon to "serve one another in love" (**5:13**). Brothers and sisters in Christ are to be long-suffering with one another, even when individuals get on one's nerves and needle one to the point of fury. It is in this regard that many Christians would do well to heed the words of Paul: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (**5:15**). Today, many Christians are "biting and devouring" one another as so-called defenders of the faith once for all delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**). This faith, according to many Christians, is not faith in Jesus, but the orthodoxy of a distinctive group. Since there are over twenty-five distinctive fellowships within the religious body that I grew up in, one should cautiously approach the traditional interpretations handed down from one generation to the next by each distinctive fellowship. In this same chapter (**5**), Paul draws attention to the kind of behavior that God demands of His people:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature

with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (**5:22-26**).

Freedom in Christ does not mean that one can refuse to comply with the Law of God (**Romans 3:31**). All Christians should, even as Paul, delight in the Law of God (**7:22**), because the Law of God is "holy, righteous, and good" (**7:12**). Freedom in Christ concerns one's relationship with God. In the words of Stott: "It means that our acceptance depends not on our obedience to the law's demands, but on faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse of the law when He died."[15] Thus, for Paul, when individuals love one another, they can say, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (**5:14**). Morris makes the point that "Christians enjoy freedom indeed, but it is the freedom to serve other people in love."[16] One cannot read this section of Scripture about love without reflection upon the words of Jesus in **Matthew 22:37-40**. Once more, Morris draws attention to the usefulness of the Law in defining behavior that pleases God: "The rejection of law-keeping as the way of salvation does not alter the fact that the law gives us a useful guide to the way we should live."[17]

James Versus Paul

Even though Christians are justified by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, one must involve himself or herself in good works, which God ordained that His people perform. One can hardly reflect upon the words of Paul about justification by faith without some reflection upon the words of James: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (**2:24**). The following chart sets forth the two sections of Scripture that appear on the surface to be in opposition:

Galatians 3:6-12	**James 2:14-25**
Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."[a] [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. [10] All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."[c] [11] Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by	What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [15] Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. [16] If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? [17] In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. [18] But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. [19] You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. [20] You foolish man, do you

faith."[d] 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."	want evidence that faith without deeds is useless[a]? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"[b] and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

These two Scriptures (**Galatians 3:6-12** and **James 2:14-25**), on surface reading, seemingly contradict each other. Needless to say, the contradiction is only apparent, not real. As one encounters the various distinctive fellowships within the Churches of Christ, one quickly observes that expositors of the Word of God often read the New Testament in light of their own cultural experience of salvation by works, not salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Many interpret **James 2:14-25** in terms of their own odd fellowship or prevailing cultural religious background. It is not uncommon for believers to read the Holy Scriptures through a pair of spectacles created through the framework of their own thought patterns rather than reading the Scriptures inductively.

James 2:14-25 is cited by many well-meaning Christians in order to nullify **Galatians 3:6-12**. This remark is not intended to question the integrity of those who undermine the words of Paul in **Galatians 2:16**. Nevertheless, every believer in Christ must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to the church from the forefathers. Many still confuse a traditional reading of a text with the text itself. The traditional interpretation assigned to **James 2:14-25**, especially within many Churches of Christ, make it difficult, if not almost impossible, to read the text accurately. The powerful in influence, frequently, have a difficult time of hearing God's Word correctly. Whenever an interpretation of a certain passage becomes normative for a particular fellowship and is passed on as authoritative, one dare not question orthodoxy for fear of excommunication. Tradition frequently stands in the way of one's listening anew to the biblical text.

Jesus Versus Satan

Just a casual glance from Matthew's Gospel also reveals a scenario between Jesus and Satan in which a similar situation took place—the pitting of one Scripture against another Scripture. In this scene, which describes the temptation of Jesus, one observes Satan citing a Scripture to Jesus to give so-called validity to his request. Yes, Satan, too, sought to cancel out one Scripture with another Scripture. In the temptation of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew (**4:1-11**), one observes Satan's use of **Psalm 91:11-12**. But his application of this Scripture made the psalmist say something that he certainly did not say. Satan's handling of **Psalm 91:11-12** contradicts **Deuteronomy 6:16**. Satan sets one Scripture against another, but Jesus corrected his misapplication. Even today, many churches practice this same strategy of invalidating one Scripture with another Scripture. But this practice of misapplication of biblical texts is on a much larger scale within the various churches scattered throughout the world, not just the fellowship that I grew up in. Scriptures are frequently cited in such a way that it makes the Bible say what it does not say. The traditional interpretation of **James 2:14-25** can be clarified by comparing other pertinent passages. One should never press into a passage a thought that contradicts another passage.

Unraveling the Apparent Discrepancies Between

James and Paul

As one seeks to unravel the apparent contradiction between Paul and James, one must bear in mind that Paul and James do not stand face-to-face but rather back-to-back. In other words, they are fighting different enemies, not each other. Paul talks about the "root" of faith, but James, on the other hand, talks about the "fruit" of faith. One is dealing with legalism and the other is dealing with antinomianism. When James writes about works, he writes about works of faith, not works of Law. The faith that saves is the faith that produces works. As one carefully reads these two books—Romans and James—one quickly observes that both James and Paul stress that Christianity must be ethically demonstrated. Paul places emphasis upon grace and faith in the initial act of justification, but James, on the other hand, stresses action and works after one's justification by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ upon the cross. One can summarize both Paul and James by saying that it is faith alone that justifies, but the faith that justifies is not alone. Dynamic faith involves the whole man. The faith that saves will produce good works.

In the words of William Barclay, "The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works."[18] Vernon McGee is also helpful in his comments: "James is not talking about the works of the Law. He simply says that the faith which saves you will produce works, works of faith. The faith that James is talking about here is professing faith, that which is phony and counterfeit."[19] On the one hand, Paul speaks of saving faith: "a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be

justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (**Galatians 2:16**). Yet, on the other hand, Paul writes about works, in this same epistle, in the life of one who is put right with God through faith in

Jesus: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (**6:9**). Earlier in Galatians, Paul also wrote about the works of the flesh and the consequences of such unethical behavior:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (**5:19-21**).

Then Paul illustrates the positive aspects of good works in the life of every believer:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (**5:22-25**).

Both Paul and James taught that faith must be a working faith. Again, McGee correctly states: "Now James deals with the identification of faith. Saving faith can be recognized and identified by certain spiritual fingerprints."[20] The following citation from Barclay is worth citing, which illustrates the preceding comments with pungent clarity:

> What James is arguing against is the first kind of belief, the acceptance of a fact without allowing it to have any influence upon life. The devils are intellectually convinced of the existence of God; they, in fact, tremble before him; but their belief does not alter them in the slightest. What Paul held was the second kind of belief. For him to believe in Jesus meant to take that belief into every section of life and to live by it.
>
> It is easy to pervert Paulinism and to emasculate *believe* of all effective meaning; and it is not really Paulinism but a misunderstood form of it that James condemns. He is condemning profession without practice and with that condemnation Paul would have entirely agreed.
>
> (iii) Even allowing for that, there is still a difference between James and Paul—*they begin at different times in the Christian life*. Paul begins *at the very beginning*. He insists that no man can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God; a man can only accept the forgiveness which God offers him in Jesus Christ.
>
> James begins much later *with the professing Christian*, the man who claims to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God. Such a man, James rightly says, must live a new life for he is a new creature. He has been *justified*; he must now show that he is *sanctified*. With that Paul would have entirely agreed.
>
> The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works. By far the best analogy is that of a great human love. He who is loved is certain that he does not deserve to be loved;

> but he is also certain that he must spend his life trying to be worthy of that love.
> The difference between James and Paul is a difference of starting-point. Paul starts with the great basic fact of the forgiveness of God which no man can earn or deserve; James starts with the professing Christian and insists that a man must prove, his Christianity by his deeds. We are not saved by deeds; we are saved for deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. Paul's emphasis is on the first and James' is on the second. In fact they do not contradict but complement each other; and the message of both is essential to the Christian faith in its fullest form.[21]

As one seeks to unravel the twisting of **James 2:14-25**, it is advantageous to add the thoughts of many others in analyzing this pericope that is so frequently misapplied in order to uphold a denial of Paul's affirmation about salvation by faith apart from works of Law. Once more, Warren W. Wiersbe, another witness, is to the point when he writes: "Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration. That kind of faith is dead."[22] Kent Hughes is also on target when he writes:

> What about works? We may ask. The answer was given by Christ to some good-deeds Jews: "The work of god is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). The unregenerate heart thinks of works first as it desires salvation. But Jesus says the first "work" is to believe. After this, a true faith works and works and works and works."[23]

Again, Hughes goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "Paul's teaching about faith and works focuses on the time *before* conversion, and James' focus is *after* conversion."[24]

As one reflects upon the entire Book of Galatians, one discovers that it is not a case of either faith or works, but rather it is a case of both faith and works in the scheme of redemption. But, on the other hand, faith is the channel by which God imputes His righteousness. This righteousness is not received from God through works, but through faith. To rephrase the preceding thoughts again, one can say that one is not saved *by* works but *for* works. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul expresses this concept:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

As stated above, faith involves the whole man. Paul in writing to Titus also expresses this same truth about salvation and works. He writes about God's grace and its implications in the lives of God's people:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-

controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. [15] These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:9-15**).

Paul immediately encourages Titus to remind the people to do what is good. But, at the same time, Paul was also careful to state how a person is put in a right relationship with God. Listen once more to Paul as he develops his thoughts to Titus:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, [2] to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. [3] At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. [4] But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. [8] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**3:1-8**).

CHAPTER 6

A Man Reaps What He Sows

6:7-10

As one reaches the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Galatians, one observes that he stresses the ethical implications resulting from salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In **chapter 5**, he condemns the works of the flesh and advocates works of the Spirit if one wishes eternal life. In his final remarks (**chapter 6**), he again issues a warning about ungodly behavior and, at the same time, encourages all believers to do good works:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. [8] The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature [a] will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. [9] Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. [10] Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (**Galatians 6:7-10**).

CONCLUSION

The Book of Galatians is Christocentric, that is to say Christ centered. In this short Epistle, Paul answers the question: How can a man/woman be justified and acceptable before a holy God? Paul responds by saying that God accomplished this marvelous feat through the cross of Christ. For Paul salvation is only possible through the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, this Epistle is full of the cross of Christ. Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for one's salvation. One is not justified by works, but rather through faith in Jesus (**Galatians 2:16**). Nothing can be added to the work of Christ. If one could be saved through his/her own merits (law keeping), then Christ died for nothing (**2:21**). Salvation is a free gift and man can add nothing to it. Thus, Paul vehemently advances salvation by faith alone. Thus, for Paul, the Galatians belonged to the "family of believers" (**6:10**).

Paul refused to tolerate any system that undermines the truth of the Gospel. Faith is the factor that unites us with God's community, not a perfect understanding of the Bible. In the final phase of this Book, Paul calls attention to how every individual becomes a child of God: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (**3:26**). Paul refuses to put up with any teaching that is contrary or inconsistent with faith as the means of justification. In another epistle (Romans), Paul tells the Romans that the Righteousness that comes from God begins with faith and ends with faith (**Romans 1:16-17**). Paul even took Peter to task when he withdrew table-fellowship from the uncircumcised Gentile believers. It is not uncommon for Christians, even today, to withdraw fellowship from other believers over the manner of distribution of the bread in the Lord's Supper, the number of containers used to distribute the fruit of the vine, the employment of the class method of conducting Bible studies, kitchens in church buildings, the distribution of funds collected on Sunday morning, the support of Bible colleges or universities from monies collected on Sunday morning, whether one can or cannot employ an instrument in praise to God during a so-called worship service, and so on. For many, within the Churches of Christ, it is faith plus the correct interpretation upon certain Scriptures that coincides with the status quo of a particular party.

Finally, Paul addresses the subject of holiness after justification by faith. Evidently, there were some who put forth the belief that if one is saved by grace then it does not matter how one lives. But in response to this philosophy, Paul says that it does matter. Even though Christians have been freed from the Law as a means of justification, still one is not free to break the Law. Paul expresses it this way:

> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. [14] The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] [15] If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (**Galatians 5:13-15**).

God's people are to seek to "live by the Spirit" (**5:16**), and to be "led by the Spirit" (**5:18**). Paul encourages every believer to "keep in step with the Spirit" (**5:25**). God wants His children to bear fruit that is pleasing to Himself (**5:22-25**). Having said all this, nevertheless, he still closed this Epistle with reference to salvation that is made available in and through Jesus Christ by His cross. The last words of this Epistle read:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen" (**6:18**). The answer to salvation can be nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christians Freedom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 161.

[3] Ibid., 161, 162.

[4] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 126.

[5] See John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 93, for an excellent treatment of the giving of God's Law to Moses. I am indebted to Stott for his insightful comments about the Law's purpose.

[6] John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downer Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 117.

[7] Ibid., 103, 104.

[8] Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 123-124.

[9] Ibid., 126.

[10] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christians Freedom*, 150.

[11] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One* Way, 233.

[12] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 156.

[13] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of* Galatians: Only One Way, 140.

[14] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 45.

[15] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of* Galatians: Only One Way, 143.

[16] Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*, 165.

[17] Ibid.

[18] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 74.

[19] J. Vernon McGee, "James" in *Through the Bible: First Corinthians Through Revelation*, Volume 5 (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1983), 649.

[20] Ibid., 650.

[21] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 73, 74.

[22] Warren W. Wiersbe, "James" in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire "Be" Series* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 354.

[23] R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991), 112.

[24] Ibid., 108.

overview of the Book ofRomans

Thrust Statement: **The theme of the Book of Romans is justification by faith alone.**

INTRODUCTION

This exposition of the **Book of Romans** is not a verse-by-verse commentary, but rather it zeros in on the overall theme of the Book in order to draw attention to God's plan of salvation for a lost humanity. Before one attempts a detailed study of this Book, one needs a brief overview of the book's central focus. As one approaches the **Book of Romans**, one quickly observes that Paul develops the concept of justification through faith in Jesus, not works. Paul begins with the Gospel (**1:1—11:36**) and concludes with his exhortation to Christian living (**12:1—15:22**), along with his final words of encouragement and greetings (**15:23—16.27**). Yet in **chapter 16,** one discerns that this section is also a hall of fame for women. One cannot read this letter without a consciousness that the major theme of this discourse is about God's Gospel, that is to say, God's plan of salvation made available to all humanity "in" and "through" Jesus Christ by faith (**1:16-17**). This volume is about God's righteousness and how it is imputed to humanity. God's wisdom is that He has made His righteousness available to all who will put their trust in Jesus.

After setting forth God's means of justification, Paul surveys the condition, or standing, of both Gentiles (**1:18—2:16**) and Jews (**2:17-29**). Both groups are sinners and stand in need of salvation, that is, God's righteousness (**3:23**). He explains the provision of salvation by God as in and through Jesus Christ. One receives God's righteousness by faith, not by works. One always works from justification, not to it. This righteousness that God imputes begins with faith and ends with faith. God's righteousness is a righteousness that is outside of humanity. This righteousness can only be credited (λογιψζομαι logizomai, "count, reckon, calculate; credit, place to one's account") to one who believes (**Chapter 4**). God's righteousness is something that is done to one; it is alien to every individual. Once one is put in a right relationship with God through faith, this person then wants to do whatever it takes to bring honor to

God. Those clothed with the righteousness of God do good, not as a condition of being forgiven, but in gratitude of forgiveness. For Paul, salvation is only the beginning of one's walk with God.

It is only in the Cross of Jesus that one discovers that God has done what must be done to reconcile sinful men and women unto Himself (**5:1-11**). Paul demonstrates this truth by calling attention to Christ as the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. For example, when one is "in Christ," he or she is freed from God's wrath (**Chapter 5**), freed from the dominion of sin (**Chapter 6**), freed from the curse of the Law (**Chapter 7**), and freed from condemnation (**Chapter 8**). In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. As one seeks to understand justification, one is conscious that justification is what God does for sinful humanity. In other words, justification is not a change in one's moral state; it is what God does—credits His righteousness—for both men and women who put their trust in Jesus. This righteousness that belongs to God is a righteousness that is outside both men and women. This righteousness from God is not personal holiness or even correct teaching.

Prior to Paul's comments in **Chapters 5**, **6**, **7**, and **8**, he elaborates on the negatives and the positives of justification by using Abraham as the model upon which to base one's relationship to God. Was Abraham justified by faith or by works? Just a perusal of **Chapter 4** reveals that he was not justified by works (**4:4-8**), that he was not justified by circumcision (**4:9-12**), that he was not justified by law (**4:13-15**), but rather he was justified by faith (**4:16—25**). Paul set forth Abraham's justification to give credence to his arguments that one can only be justified by faith alone. Before zeroing in on two kinds of righteousness—righteousness as an attribute and righteousness that is vicarious—one needs to pay attention to certain words or phrases that are peppered throughout this Book. In order to grasp the significance of God's plan of salvation by faith "in" and "through" Christ, it will help to observe the frequency of certain key phrases or key words in order for one to get a brief overall view of this most revealing Book. One's consciousness of the phrases that Paul employs through his Book helps one to focus more clearly on the place—"in Christ"—that salvation is found.

Throughout the **Book of Romans**, one discovers that Paul employs the word *gospel* twelve times (**1:1, 2, 9, 15, 16, 17; 2: 16; 11:28; 15:16, 19, 20, 25**). Another phrase—"through Him"—also attests to the fact that salvation can only be in Jesus. This unique expression occurs four times in Romans (**1:5; 5:9; 8:37; 11:36**). Paul also employs another combination with the word *through*. For example, he writes the following phrase—"through Jesus Christ"—five times in this Book (**1:8; 2:16; 5:21; 7:25; 16:27**). Again, Paul utilizes an additional phrase—"in Christ" to capture where salvation is found. He makes use of this phrase five times (**Romans 9:1; 12:5; 16:7, 9, 10**). "In Christ" also appears with Jesus' personal name "Jesus" six times (**6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 15:17; 16:3**). Once Paul varies his expression to "in Jesus" (**3:22**) and once to "in Jesus Christ" (**3:26**). The preposition "in" is used to capture the location of salvation. Listen to Paul, once more, as he seeks to call attention to the place of salvation with the following phrase, "in Him." This expression occurs five times (**4:24; 9:23; 10:11; 15:12, 13**). Paul uses other terms to communicate where salvation is found. For example, he uses the phrase "with Him" six times (**6:4, 5 [2x], 8; 8:32**). The word *faith* occurs forty times (**1:5, 8, 12, 17** [2x]; **3:3** [2x], **22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30**

[2x], **4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16** [2x], **20; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; 10:6, 8, 17; 11:20; 12:3, 6; 14:1, 2** [2x], **23** [2x], and the word *justified* crops up eight times (**3:24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 8:30** [2x] **10:10**).

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

As stated above, Paul uses the word gospel (eujaggevlion euaggelion, "good news") twelve times in the **Book of Romans**. It is significant that Paul utilizes this word *gospel* six times in the first chapter. The Gospel is Good News about God's way of salvation "in Christ" by faith, not works. The Good News is that God has done what is necessary for one's salvation. In other words, one's acceptance with God has been established "in" and "through" Jesus. In Jesus, one witnesses the love of God as a gift. The Good News is that God invaded history to free both men and women from the bondage of sin and guilt. It is in Christ that God has revolutionized one's relationship with Him. The Good News is about forgiveness in and through Jesus. The great mystery of the Christian faith is that when one accepts what Christ has done upon the Cross, one can accept the forgiveness that God offers through His love and mercy. In the Cross of Jesus, one discovers that everything necessary for one's forgiveness has been done. The Good News is that God Himself has provided the decisive safeguard for salvation—the Cross of Jesus is that event.

THROUGH AND IN CHRIST JESUS

Paul is fond of the words *in* and *through* in association with Christ. These two propositions help one to focus on the place of salvation offered by God's free grace. After Paul's introduction to the Book of Romans, he develops God's justification for His wrath against all ungodliness. In the fourth chapter, he explains the Good News of God—salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. In chapters five, six, seven, and eight, Paul lays out four main subjects: God's wrath, dominion of sin, curse of the Law, and condemnation. In these four chapters, Paul sets forth God's remedy and escape—Jesus Christ. As one reaches the end of chapter 5 about God's wrath, one observes Paul's way of escape: "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, [21] so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ (διαψ dia, "through") our Lord (5:20-21).

In the sixth Chapter Paul labors that humanity is under the dominion of Sin. Sin has dominion over both men and women. Yet, Paul answer to this dilemma is Jesus. Once more Paul refers to Jesus as the means of escape: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in[a] (εψν en, "in") Christ Jesus our Lord" (**6:23**).[1] In Chapter seven, Paul paints a rather dismal picture of the Law's curse. Yet, in this Chapter, Paul **lays** down the means of escape: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God—through (διαψ dia, "through") Jesus Christ our Lord (**7:24-25**)! Then, finally, in Chapter eight, he calls attention to condemnation of those outside Christ. Again, Paul paints a picture of Christ as the only means of escaping condemnation: "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in (εψν en, "in") Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:39**). In Chapter five and seven it is "through,"

but in Chapters six and eight, it is "in." For Paul, salvation can only be found "through" and "in" Him.

JUSTIFIED

The word *justified* occurs eight times in the **Book of Romans**. Its first occurrence is found in **Romans 3:24**. As Paul leads up to this phrase, he calls attention to righteousness from God that is essential for salvation. He brushes away all underbrush and goes right to the very core of justification:

> 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**3:21-24**).

One word that jumps out is the word *freely*. This word is from the Greek word δωρεαΨν dwrean, which means "without cost, as a free gift, for nothing." This word takes on great significance when one looks at this same word in **John 15:25**: "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'[b]" The phrase "without reason" is from the Greek word δωρεαΨν dwrean, which is the same word translated "freely" in **Romans 3:24**. Paul is saying, in **3:24**, that God justifies the sinner without a cause on his or her behalf; it is all of grace. Then, just after this note about "justified freely by his grace," he again uses the word *justified* for a second time in order to reinforce this concept of salvation by grace: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:28**). To reinforce the means of "justification by faith," Paul introduces Abraham in order to prove beyond the shadow-of-a-doubt that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not works. Paul introduces the subject of justification by dealing with works: "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness"[a] (**4:2-3**). How was Abraham justified? Paul says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Paul concludes his arguments with this summary:

> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (**3:23-25**).

After citing the Old Testament to prove his thesis—justification by faith—he begins the fifth chapter by stating: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we[b] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (**5:1-2**). To help one understand "imputed righteousness," one needs to begin with **Romans 1:17**. An understanding of this verse will lay the

groundwork for comprehension of this most misunderstood way of God saving humanity.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IMPUTED TO ONE WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST ROMANS 1:17 AND 10:3-4

The very hub of justification by faith begins with **Romans 1:17**. Christians must distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living (**Chapter 12**) and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is, a righteousness done for humanity (**1:16-17**). What is the "righteousness of God" in **1:17** and **10:3-4**? Is it the righteousness that justifies the sinner or the righteousness of the Christian life? The question is: Does Paul employ the word "righteousness" in the sense of that which is imputed to man or in the sense of that which man performs? Does this righteousness involve one's keeping the commandments of God?[2] Or, is this a righteousness that is outside man? Is the righteousness in **1:17** and **10:3-4** imputed or earned?[3] Put another way, how is man placed in a right relationship with God? Is it by imputation or by works? Even though both kinds of righteousness appear in the **Book of Romans**, the question still remains concerning the proper exegesis of the above passages. Since Paul employs the word "righteousness" in both senses, one must exercise discriminating judgment in distinguishing between the various nuances based upon context in which the term is used. One must distinguish between the "righteousness of faith" and "the righteousness of holy living" (sanctification).[4] "Active" righteousness is the fruit of "passive" righteousness. Sanctification (active) is the fruit of righteousness by faith (passive).[5]

In **Romans 1-8**, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. Even though he stresses justification by faith alone, or imputed righteousness, in the first eight chapters, he, nevertheless, addresses the fact that all Christians are servants of righteousness. God is concerned about holiness in the lives of those to whom He has imputed His righteousness. But the focus of the first part of Romans is imputed righteousness, that is to say, how a man is placed in a right relationship with God. Thus, Paul's emphasis is upon "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (**Romans 1:17**). More clearly put, the emphasis is upon the righteousness of God, separate and apart from works of law, imputed to man through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the theme of these eight chapters is: How can a man be justified? Is it by works or by faith? After Paul's emphasis on justification by faith,[6] he demonstrates graphically that holiness is the believer's spiritual worship. Thus, Paul begins chapter twelve with emphasis upon holy living, not for justification, but as the means of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice which is one's worship. Once an individual is free from God's wrath through Jesus Christ, Paul emphasizes the behavior of those who through faith are righteous. Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord (**Titus 2:12-14**).[7] "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness," said Paul (**Romans 6:18**). Those in Christ are "servants of God," and therefore, they are to "have fruit unto holiness" (**Romans 6:22**).

But the word "righteousness" (dikaiosuvnh, dikaiosuvnh) in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4** is much more comprehensive than personal holiness or even correct teaching.[8]

This righteousness is the righteousness of the new aeon—the righteousness of God[9] revealed through Jesus Christ. When Paul articulates the "righteousness of God" in **Romans 1:17** and Romans **10:3-4,** he is not using the word "righteousness" as an activity on the part of man but as an activity on the part of God. Perhaps to better clarify, God gives us Christ as "righteousness." This "righteousness" is not the "righteousness of law," but the "righteousness of God."

The law of God can never, under any circumstances, be a way of salvation, not even for one "in Christ" (**Romans 7:14-25**). Paul differentiates between the "righteousness of law" and the "righteousness of faith." If one is to have a correct understanding of the "righteousness of God," without law, it is essential that one distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is to say, a righteousness that is done for us, not in us.[10] This righteousness *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith, not good deeds performed, or works of the law, or a correct understanding of Scripture.

Imputed righteousness is entirely outside the behavior of the believer.[11] It is the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus.[12] Adding anything to this substitutionary work and calling it our righteousness by faith is blasphemy. We work from justification, not to it. Justification is the mother of sanctification.[13] Before justification, man was the "servant of sin," but after justification, he is a "servant of righteousness" (**Romans 6:16-22**).

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND THE LIFE OF HOLINESS
ROMANS 6

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned about right conduct,[14] even as the law is.[15] This is self-evident from Paul's arguments in **Romans, chapter 6**, about "free from sin." No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. It is not in that sense that a Christian is "free from the law." But it is only "in Christ"[16] that the law is fulfilled in us (**Romans 8:4**). This fulfillment is not something accomplished by man, but by God in Christ. Even though man is "free from sin," nevertheless, he is exhorted to "yield" his "members servants to righteousness unto holiness (**Romans 6:19b**)." Since man cannot keep the law perfectly, Christ's right conduct is credited to man through faith.[17] The Gospel is insistent upon man's holiness in the presence of God. The Gospel does not do away with law as an expression of God's will.[18]

Paul, in essence, says this very thing in **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." We do not dismiss the law, the gospel establishes it. "To Paul there can be no thought of the law dying. It is not a case of the Christian's decision to regard the law as repealed and nonexistent . . . . Nor can it be said that, with the coming of Christ, the law was outdated and abolished," says Nygren.[19] There is a distinction between the "law dying" and the believer "dying to the law."

In **Romans 7**, Paul specifically states that the believer is "dead to the law" and is "delivered from the law" (**Romans 7:4, 6**).[20] This death to the law is the only way one can escape the "wrath of God." Even though the Christian is "Not under law";

nevertheless, he or she delights in God's law. Paul sets forth the question: "Is the law sin?" (**Romans 7:7**). No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (**Romans 7:12**). The Christian delights in the law of God after the inward man (**Romans 7:22**). Paul not only delighted in God's law, but he also served the law of God. For example, he writes: "with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (**Romans 7:25**). Even though Paul served the law of God, he did not serve the law of God for justification. Christians work not TO justification, but FROM justification.[21] Paul stresses that God's grace teaches believers to live holy lives:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works (**Titus 2:11-14**).

PURPOSE OF GOD'S GOSPEL

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant to do? What is it supposed to achieve? Is the Gospel merely to forgive sinners and deliver them from hell? No! The end of the gospel is to reveal an answer to Job's question: "How shall a man be just with God?" (**Job 9:2**). The business of the gospel is to make persons righteous in His sight, to make people acceptable to God, to enable individuals to stand in the presence of one's Holy God. How does God accomplish this feat? It is only by the fact that one is in Christ that one can stand in the presence of a Holy God. Christ has become for everyone all that God requires of one.

Justification is the central purpose of the Gospel of God. In the Gospel, God reveals righteousness apart from law. The "righteousness apart from law" is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness from God does not make void the just requirements of the law; rather it establishes the law's goal.[22] It is this righteousness apart from the law that Paul calls the "righteousness of God." Thus, the status of righteousness that the law sought to bring about is now realized in anyone who accepts Jesus as God's appointed means of salvation. To restate this truth concisely, "the righteousness of God" comes to one through faith in Jesus.

Can a one be just with God through law keeping? No! If one is "under law," any law, Old Testament or New Testament, then, before one can be placed in a right relationship with God, the law of God must be kept perfectly in every respect. James, brother of Jesus, explains this thought in this way: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (**James 2:10**). The law condemns. Under law one is under God's Wrath (**Romans 5**), under the dominion of Sin **(Romans 6**), under the curse of the Law (**Romans 7**), and under Condemnation (**Romans 8**). How can man escape the *wrath* of God, the *dominion* of sin, the *curse* of the law, and God's *condemnation*?[23] There is only one way; namely, "in and through Jesus Christ."[24] This is what the Gospel is all about. This is the whole glory of the gospel. Why did Paul rejoice in the Gospel? He gives us his answer: "For in the

gospel (ejn aujtw'/ ejn aujtw, "in it") a righteousness from God is revealed" (**Romans 1:17**).

In one's confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and belief in His resurrection, one receives the "righteousness of God," apart from law. God does not loose the just requirements of His moral law,[25] but He upholds his demands through Jesus. In one's acknowledgment and acceptance of Jesus as God's way of salvation, God imputes,[26] that is to say, credits, to that individual the righteousness of his Son. Where justification is exalted, the law of God is elevated. Justification by faith makes the law and the sinner friends: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (**Romans 7:22**).

Even though Paul expresses his delight in the law of God, he does not delight in the law of God for justification. Why? In **Romans 3:19-20**, Paul sets forth the terrifying aspects of the law. He says that the law of God shuts every man's mouth, no man can boast. But the apostle does not leave man in despair; he gives hope to sinful man. Paul reveals how a man can be righteous before a holy God. Immediately, he develops this righteousness from God, apart from law. Paul's assessment of man's situation is full of hope, he writes:

> But now a righteousness from God apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

"BUT NOW"—THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL
ROMANS 3:21-24

"But now" (ΝυνιΨ δεψ Nuni de) is the heart of the Gospel of Christ.[27] This "but now" is how faith answers the indictment of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—"but now." No man ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of his holy law. Well, is there hope for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The Apostle answers these questions. How? "But now!" Yes, God's grace provides the righteousness his law demands. The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for man in Christ Jesus. "But now" is man's defense against the curse of law. This is the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel tells us of a righteousness from God, a righteousness provided by God, *in* and *through* our Lord Jesus Christ (**3:24**). Jesus has satisfied the law of God on man's behalf. He fulfilled the law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is *external* to man, a righteousness that is *alien* to man, a righteousness that is *passive* to man, a righteousness that is *imputed* to man.[28] This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it.[29] But God unfolds it and presents it on display in the Gospel of his crucified Son;

Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the Gospel. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals his way of redeeming sinners and upholding his holiness. Paul poignantly captures this truth when he pens:

> God presented him a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

IMPUTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF CHRIST ROMANS 3:25-26

Justification by faith is a legal transaction[30] related to God's law and to divine jurisprudence. The idea of imputation (righteousness that is credited to man) is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement (Christ died as a substitute for man).[31] Imputation and substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. The ultimate act of salvation is in the Christ event. Thus, it is fitting to call God's redemptive act in Christ "the righteousness of God." This righteousness is *furnished* by God, *devised* by God, *made obtainable* by God. It is God's salvation from beginning to end. The prophets testify to this event. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:6**)." Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, writes:

> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:5, 11-12**).

Not only is the "righteousness of God" that which belongs to His Son Jesus that comes to every individual through faith, but Jesus is the "righteousness of God." Paul, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4**, is not talking about acts of righteousness, or the doing of good deeds, but rather the issue of "imputed righteousness"—a righteousness bestowed upon man through faith in His Son Jesus. If one is to understand "imputed righteousness," he or she, first of all, must understand how one becomes a sinner before God. Sensitivity to this question will shed great light on how one becomes righteous before God.

Paul speaks of this righteousness as coming from God, not man; he describes it as "God's righteousness." Very succinctly, he writes about "a righteousness from God, apart from law" (**Romans 3:21**). This "righteousness from God" is Christ's faithfulness, truthfulness, and obedience to God's law. These attributes of Christ are *credited* to the believer as his own. Paul uses *credited* (λογιψζομαι logizomai) eleven times in Chapter four of Romans.

The central thought in justification is that, although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (**4:9-19**), God declares him righteous through the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our righteousness. Paul aptly stresses the centrality of the gospel: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). Jesus is our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. This is the only means by which sinful man can stand before his God. One can only boast in the Lord, not his works of righteousness. Jesus is "our everything."

ABRAHAM AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS
ROMANS 4

Brinsmead captures the essence of imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ when he writes:

> The whole concept of imputation is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement. Imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other. . . . God laid our sins on Jesus Christ by imputation. He "was numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12). This is how He was made. . . to be sin for us." There was nothing in Him worthy of death. But He was condemned by the righteous judgment of God, for He had been made to be sin by imputation. In this sense it was right that Christ should suffer the wrath of God. He had to be treated *as if* He were a sinner.[32]

Paul expounds upon the principle of justification by faith by using Abraham to prove that the "righteousness of God" is *credited* to man "through faith." Since the Scripture is its best interpreter, one should look to "it is written" for one's understanding of that which God reveals to His people through the Holy Spirit. Note the following Scriptures:

> Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation (**Romans 4:4**).
> His faith is *credited* as righteousness (**Romans 4:5**).
> David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works (**Romans 4:6**).
> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him (**Romans 4:8**).
> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith (**Romans 4:13**).
> The words "it was *credited* to him" were not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (**Romans 4:24**).

Again, one should reflect upon Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he contemplates the "righteousness of God." For example, "Christ Jesus . . . has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1**

Corinthians 1:30). This "righteousness of God" is JESUS CHRIST. Remember, "the Scriptures foresaw," says Paul, "that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you" (**Galatians 2:8**). Paul very vividly describes the "righteousness that is by faith":

> Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says:
> The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (**Romans 10:5, 6, 8, 10**).

One must be careful that he or she does not fall into the same error of the Jews, that is to say, seeking to establish one's own righteousness through law keeping. It is not uncommon for believers today to seek justification through "absolute perfection" in knowledge and obedience (sanctification) to God. One may be mistaken about many things taught in the Scriptures, but one's salvation is NOT contingent upon absolute freedom from error in knowledge nor is one's salvation conditional upon perfect obedience to law. One's salvation is dependent upon one's acceptance of Jesus, who is God's righteousness, the savior of the world. If the head is righteous, then the body is righteous.

To state more fully, this righteousness is unattainable by obedience to any law, old or new, or by merit of one's own initiative, or any other condition than that of faith "in Christ." It *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith (**Romans 1:17b**). Nygren pinpoints this truth: "Faith is the beginning and the culmination."[33] The man or woman who trusts in Christ becomes "the righteousness of God in Him."[34] One becomes "in Christ" all that God requires a man or woman to be, all that he or she could never be in-and-of themselves. Thus, everyone must conclude that a person is justified "freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Freedom from *wrath*, *sin*, *law*, and *condemnation* is *in* and *through* Jesus Christ our Lord (**Romans 5:21b**; **6:23b**; **7:25b**; **8:39b**). Is it any wonder that Paul writes "Therefore having been justified by faith, peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 5:1**). "Faith alone"[35] means that the righteousness of God's provisions is everything necessary for one's salvation. It is "from faith to faith," said Paul (**Romans 1:17**). Paul stresses, as stated above, forcefully this truth with double prepositions: it *begins* with faith and it *ends* with faith. Robert Brinsmead correctly states:

> **Imputation.** The words *impute, reckon, account, credit* all come from the Greek word *logizomai,* which is used eleven times in Romans 4. The believer has righteousness imputed or credited to him (Rom. 4:6). This is "the righteousness of One," even Christ (Rom. 5:18, KJV). Paul is not talking about the believer's experience but about his status in the judgment of God. Imputation of our sins to Christ (Rom. 5:19-21) and of His righteousness to us deals with legal realities. Neither the imputation of sin

nor of righteousness means a change of character of the object. But it does change the way the object is regarded. Surely Calvary is the proof of this.[36]

SINNERS THROUGH ADAM
ROMANS 5:15-19

To appreciate more fully the subject of righteousness through imputation, one must reflect upon Paul's analogy between the first Adam and the second Adam (**Romans 5:15-19**). One does not become a sinner because of something that happens within; but one is a sinner because of something that took place outside man in another person, namely, Adam. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (**Romans 5:15-19**). Adam was the first father. He stood as the federal head. The whole human race is constituted in him. When Adam fell, it was the same as if every man had fallen.[37] Paul maintains that through one man (Adam), death reigned, and through one man (Jesus), the gift of righteousness reigns:

> But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (**Romans 5:15-19**).

In **Romans 5**, Paul develops imputation from Adam as well as imputation from Christ. God reverses the fall of Adam by giving the human race another Father, as it is written:

> For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**).[38]

Just as the whole race is comprehended in Adam, so God comprehends all faithful humanity in His Son. Jesus became the new Head, the Representative, the Father of the fallen race. Robert Brinsmead captures the essence of the righteousness of God, when he says, "Jesus was the total outlay of heaven's treasure, the accumulated love and wealth of eternity, the totality of God's righteousness."[39] Paul burst forth in rapturous language when he writes: "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). In Paul's second letter to Corinth, he captures the very essence of the Gospel:

> That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:19a, 21**).

JESUS: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
ROMANS 10:1-17

Again, one must ask the question: What is this righteousness? IT IS JESUS! God's righteousness is revealed historically and transacted in the Christ event.[40] Paul makes abundantly clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness because Christ obeyed, even unto death. In the time of Christ and the apostles, the Jews, as a whole, did not comprehend this external righteousness that is credited, or imputed, to man. They went about to establish their own righteousness rather than submit to God's righteousness, which is Jesus.[41]

When one speaks of the righteousness of God, he or she is addressing the subject of justification by faith. In analyzing justification by faith, Paul discusses the relationship of the law to the believer. The believer is dead to the law. The believer is free from law. Paul argues that "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**). But the Jews were pursuing righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Thus, Paul deals with this illegal use of the law, namely, a pursuance of righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Paul further elaborates this issue in his **epistle to the Galatians**. He asserts that:

> A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**Galatians 2:16**).

Paul's concern for the Jews lies in the fact that they were going about to establish their relationship to God upon their works rather than upon the work of Christ. He does not reject obedience to the law,[42] but rejects righteousness by works, that is, the attempt to use the law to put God in one's debt. Paul writes: "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (**Romans 3:20**). From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person not guilty. From the positive viewpoint, he declares him righteous. Again, Paul exclaims: This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:2-24**).

Although all are sinners, God declares everyone who puts his or her trust in Jesus not guilty, but righteous. This legal declaration is valid because Christ lived a perfect life and died to pay the penalty for our sins; thus, His righteousness is credited to man. This imputed righteousness is the central theme of Romans, as Paul expresses this truth in **1:17**: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a

righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the primary objective of this overview is to unfold God's plan of salvation in and through Jesus. This essay is not intended to be a verse-by-verse exegesis of the **Book of Romans**, but rather the primary objective has been to set forth the central theme of the Book—justification by faith in Jesus. This analysis of Romans also focuses on holiness in the life of the believer. In other words, every believer is called to become in his or her daily living what he or she already is "in Christ." God demands actions as well as believing. Faith expresses itself in obedience. In **Romans 12:1—16:27**, Paul turns to the practical application of justification by faith. This does not mean, as pointed out earlier, that he had not already pointed out the necessity of Christian living (**Chapters 6—8**), but, beginning with **Chapter 12**, he goes into detail to show that Jesus Christ is to be Lord of every area of one's life. Paul stresses in **Romans 3:31** that being set free in Jesus does not liberate one from obedience to the Law. Paul writes: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (**3:31**). Even though Christians delight in God's law, nevertheless, one can never earn his or her salvation through Law keeping. Listen once more to Paul as he explains: "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:27-28**). Again, the words of Paul ring out loud and clear: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (**3:20**).

If one cannot be justified through the Law, How does God justify the ungodly? Brinsmead, once more, goes right to the heart of the matter when he says,

> How can a Judge who is supremely just justify the ungodly? Paul's answer is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is true that the believer is wholly a sinner in himself and will in this life continue to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). But God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus. And on this basis God can declare him righteous and treat him as if he were righteous.[43]

For one to be justified, one must be obedient to the faith (**Romans 1:5; 10:3**; **10:16**). But what does it mean to be "obedient to the faith"? What does it mean to "submit to the righteousness of God"? What does it mean to "obey the gospel"? All three phrases are synonymous. It means to submit yourselves to the "righteousness" made available through the redemption that is "in Christ Jesus." The Jews sought a salvation through law keeping, that is, "righteousness by law," rather than salvation through faith in the Christ event, that is, "righteousness through faith." The Jews, as a whole, did not "obey the gospel." To state more forcefully, they did not submit to God's way of salvation—Jesus.

Paul's argument is that man's righteousness cannot be built from below, but from above. God's imputed righteousness is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ. The only righteousness is the righteousness of faith. "A righteousness of God IN IT [Gospel] is revealed from faith to faith" (**Romans 1:17**). Paul employs, as mentioned

above, two prepositions to emphasize the faith principle:ϕ ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin (ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, "from faith to faith"). Paul drives home the point of one's justification—this righteousness begins with faith and ends with faith. It is God's righteousness, not man's righteousness through compliance with the teachings of God. The following passage is worth quoting in full, showing as it does the proper definition of faith:

> We must be careful, however, about our definition of faith, and what faith does, and where faith comes in. Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. That is where that teaching I have just been denouncing goes wrong; it says that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's Cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which links us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.[44]

The righteousness of God, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3**, is the righteousness *prepared* by God, *m**ade** available* by God, and *imparted* by God to man through faith. In these Scriptures Paul is writing about the righteousness that God declares to man, not man's holiness through holy deeds. The paramount thought is the state of being "in the right," not by works, but by Jesus. The only way man can be in union with God is through God's anointed One. No amount of good deeds can put a man right with God—only Jesus can accomplish this performance. How does God's righteousness come to man? The Scripture says "through faith."[45] Faith always points away from itself, it rests for salvation on Christ's union with God. Faith is the channel or instrument through which God's righteousness is imputed to the believer.

The law is *not* the answer to the problem of sin, but *Jesus is.* The law of God is not life, but *Jesus **is***. Grace bestows mercy, but law demands death. Yes, the written code demands death, but the Spirit gives life. It is Christ or law, not Christ and law. The Christian is not under law, but under grace. The Christian still delights in the law of God. The believer still serves the law of God, but not for justification. Remember, Paul argues the ethical implications of the law in Romans:

> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of **wickedness**, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you

> are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:12-18**).

As stated above, every believer is called to become what he or she already is in Christ. One cannot have Christian morality without having faith in Jesus, the Savior of the world. Are you really living in the love of God so that you reflect the rays of His light in your life? One cannot read the **Book of Romans** without awareness that Paul desires that in the inner life of every Christians that Christ comes to birth in a real and meaningful way. This life, according to **Romans 12**, is not intended to be merely inward, but to manifest itself outwardly. Christ has been given in order that a transformation may also come about in the lives of men and women.

The life of every believer is meant to be a life that mirrors the image of Jesus. Just a casual reading of **Romans 14—16** reveals that God desires that Christians live in love and in fellowship with one another, not in isolation from each other. Christians are to receive one another in the same way that Christ receives each individual—warts and all (**Romans 15:1-7**). Paul lays down the principles of Christian living in unity and love in **Romans 14—16**. In **Romans 6**, Paul discusses the ethical implications of one's dying with Christ. One must ask the question: How can anyone appropriate the gift of redemption and live a life in defiance of God's rich grace?

Humanity is fast stuck in the mire of sin so that men and women cannot deliver themselves from God's wrath, from the dominion of sin, from the curse of the law, and from God's condemnation. It is God's act in Christ that gives humanity a new standing. The Cross of Christ flashes like neon lights with the following picture: In Christ, God's love meets sinful humanity. God's love is not just an attitude; God's love is not just an act; God's love is the very essence of God. In the words of Paul: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us" (**5:8**). The **Book of Romans** is about how God comes to humanity "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ annihilates boasting on the part of men and women (**3:19-20**). Paul drives home the point that men and women do not find a way to God, but rather God comes to men and women in and through Jesus (**3:21-31**).

The message of hope for salvation is Jesus. One cannot read this powerful presentation of the Gospel by Paul without being wrapped up in wonder and awe and impelled to bow in humble adoration and praise for such grace (**1:8-10**). Again, one should remind himself or herself that salvation is not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin separating humanity from God is removed. For one to live in faith in the Son of God is to live in a spirit of thankfulness (**16:25-27**). The Gospel is about God's love, and God's love takes hold of everyone in Christ. This love of God manifested in the lives of His people can only be grounded in Jesus. The only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance is love grounded in Jesus (Chapter **14—16**).

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a Or *through*

[1] All Scripture citations are from the *International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

b Psalms 35:19; 69:4

a Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22

a Or *let us*

b Or *let us*

[2] Although Christians are justified by "faith alone," not faith and works; nevertheless, Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord. Paul writes that the grace of God: "Teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (**Titus 2:12-14**). Again, he pens: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (**Romans 6:18**). Righteousness of faith always leads to righteousness of life.

Holiness is the legitimate fruit of the righteousness of faith and the proof that faith is the genuine article (**James 2:14-18**). Sanctification is not optional for the believer. One cannot be saved by sanctification, but one cannot be saved without it. A person who is dead to holiness is not righteous by faith. The gospel of "free justification" saves the believer to holiness. Alister E. McGrath, ***Justification by Faith*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 57, says: "A distinction is made between *justification* and *sanctification* (or regeneration): the former is the work of God outside us, the latter his work within us."

[3] "Imputed" is from logivzomai (logizomai, "reckon, calculate, take inventory, count, consider") and is employed by Paul 34 times out of a total of 41 times in the New Testament. The Greek word is an accountant's word. In other words, God "credits" righteousness to believers through faith, not through law.

[4] Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 102, captures the essence of "sanctification," when he writes:

> Sanctification, or holiness (the two words are virtually interchangeable), is essentially conformity to the moral character of God. We normally think of sanctification as progressive, as an inner change of our character whereby we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ. That is certainly a major part of sanctification, but that is not all of it. Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more. The first is the result of the work of Christ for us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

[5] For an excellent discussion concerning "active" and "passive" righteousness, see Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness of God*, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 9-25, 57-74.

[6] Justification means to declare righteous, not to make subjectively righteous. Justification by faith in Jesus the Messiah changes our relationship to God, but justification is not a change in our moral state. Justification is what God does for us. Justification does not indicate a change in us, but it does constitute a change in the way God views us. Justification must not be merged with sanctification. One ***must not*** shift the ground of salvation from the vicarious righteousness of Christ to the personal righteousness of the believer—vicarious means it is done for us, not in us. It is by faith that the sinner

accepts the vicarious atonement of Jesus, that is to say, Jesus as the righteousness of God. Yes, justification is by "faith alone," but sanctification is NOT by "faith alone." "Faith alone" means that the righteousness of God's arrangement is everything essential for redemption. Living a life of purity depends on faith, but not faith alone.

[7] See Robert Brinsmead, *Sanctification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980, 7, where Brinsmead expresses himself most forthrightly in his comments on sanctification:

> We have taken a strong stand for the Pauline doctrine of justification by an outside-of-me righteousness as opposed to the subjectivism of the current religious scene. But Paul's doctrine of justification by faith did not do away with the law. It merely put the law in its right place (Rom. 3:31). Our purpose is not to exalt justification and degrade sanctification. We want to put sanctification in its proper place so that we can give it the great emphasis it deserves.

[8] Some Christians relate these two passages to a so-called worship service. In other words, if one utilizes individual cups in the Lord's supper, instrumental music in Sunday morning worship, Sunday school for different ages, orphan homes, Bible colleges, etc., it is argued by some that one is not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God if one adopts any of the above practices. Thus, the "righteousness of God" is identified with correct mental understanding of the Scriptures, not the righteousness made available by God through faith in Jesus.

[9] It is called the "righteousness of God" because His grace provides it. The "righteousness of God" is God's redemptive act in Christ.

[10] See Robert Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), where Brinsmead draws attention to this great truth:

> The Bible makes clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. Sin was dealt with, Satan was defeated, death was destroyed, and redemption was accomplished. This mighty action of God, which transcends every other action for all eternity, was not a work done in us (moral). It was a work done outside us in the person of Christ (legal).

[11] Throughout **Romans 3** and **4**, Paul examines righteousness being imputed rather than the believer's holiness of life. On the other hand, in the next four chapters (**5-8**), he turns his attention to the life that righteousness by faith demands. In chapters three and four, He sets forth the righteousness of God as something objective to us, reckoned to us, or set to our account; therefore, this righteousness is not internal work.

[12] In **Romans 1:17a** Paul speaks of faith. In writing about faith, Paul uses the double expression "through faith for faith" (ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, ek pistews eis pistin). This is Paul's way of excluding the thought of a righteousness of one's own, attained through law and works. By this joining of phrases (from faith to faith) the last crumb of works-righteousness is uprooted.

[13] Sanctification means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service (**2 Corinthians 6:17**). Sanctification is a continual cleansing and separation from sin; it is a continual growth in the attributes of the divine character. See also Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 13, where Brinsmead aptly stresses the centrality of sanctification:

> So, on the one hand, sanctification means separation from sin, from unholy fellowship, from the abomination of the heathen, from the world and its allurements, from the ways of the

ungodly. And, on the other hand, it means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service.

[14] The reformers stressed the distinction between the legal and moral aspects of redemption, that is, between justification and sanctification. Paul negates law as a method of salvation, not as a valid demand of a righteous God. See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 27. Where he captures the legal and moral aspects of redemption: "Any reformation of life and conduct not based on God's law is fraud. Jesus said, 'If you love Me, you will obey what I command' (**John 14:15**). While the law points us to Christ, Christ points us back to the law."

[15] Since the subject of justification by faith is not very well understood by many Christians, it is necessary to use the literary technique of "repetition" to instill this vital teaching into the hearts of God's people. In fact, there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

[16] To be "in Christ" is to be beyond the pale of the law's power. It is to be free from the "curse of the law" (**Galatians 3:10-13**). The person that is outside the realm of faith, that is, Christ, the realm of the law still rules. To be under law is to be under "wrath," "sin," and "condemnation." This is where the "good news" comes into play. Paul writes: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**).

[17] Christ fulfilled the covenantal stipulations of the Ten Commandments; Christ kept God's commandments (**John.15:10**); He fulfilled the law (**Matthew. 5:17**); He was obedient (**Philippians 2:5-9**; **Hebrews 5:7-9**); The obedience of Christ to the law of God constitutes His righteousness. The obedience of Christ was consummated in His death on the cross (**Philippians 2:8**). One might also say that Christ's act of atonement is the righteousness of Christ.

[18] See **2 Timothy 3:16-17**: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

[19] Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1967), 272.

[20] The Greek text states: "you were put to death (ejqanatwvqhte, ejqanatwvqhte) to the law" (**verse 4**), and "we were discharged (kathrghvqhmen, kathrghvqhmen) from the law" (**verse 6**).

[21] Brinsmead, ***God Righteousness of*** *God*, 106.

[22] See **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." See Brinsmead, ***Sanctification***, 8, where he correctly says: "We want to make clear that justification by faith alone is not an alternative to personal holiness but the only basis for it."

[23] I am indebted to Anders Nygren for calling attention to these concepts in his *Commentary on Romans*.

[24] Paul concludes chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 with "in and through Jesus." Chapter 5 is "*through* Jesus" (verse 21); chapter 6 is "*in* Jesus" (verse 23); chapter 7 is "*through* Jesus" (verse 25); chapter 8 is "*in* Jesus" (verse 39).

[25] Jesus told His disciples:

Do not think that I have come to abolish (katalusai) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of

these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**Mt. 5:17-19**).

[26] In the New Testament, this doctrine of "imputation" is given far-reaching attention. It is alluded to in **Romans 4:6-25** concerning Abraham's faith and his justification. Also, Paul mentions this in his second letter to Corinth: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). James also makes notice of "imputed righteousness" when he writes: "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (**James 2:23**). This word appears over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible—examples are**: Leviticus 7:18**; **2 Samuel 19:19**; **Psalms 32:2**.

[27] I am grateful to Dr. Lloyd Jones for much of my insight concerning justification by faith. The late Dr. Jones, one of the ablest and most respected Bible expositors of the twentieth century, wrote several volumes on Romans. For an illustration of his ability to express clearly the teachings of Romans, see D. M. Lloyd Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 27 where he says:

'But now.' This is the essence of the Christian position; this is how faith answers the accusations of the Law, the accusations of conscience, and everything else that would condemn and depress us. These are indeed very wonderful words, and it is most important that we should lay hold of them and realize their tremendous importance and their real significance.

[28] Christian writer Leon Morris has penned some compelling words that need to be heard. See Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1983) 187, where he says:

An important idea in the New Testament is that righteousness may be imputed. There are grounds for imputation in an Old Testament passage, that in which we read, 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' (Gn.15:6). This presents a problem to some modern people, because we so firmly believe that righteousness is an ethical quality. It is 'being good.' In that sense it is nonsense to talk about righteousness being imputed. Everyone who aspires to this kind of righteousness must merit it for himself, by right living. It cannot be 'credited' or 'reckoned' or 'imputed' to him other than in some fictitious and fanciful sense. But when we see righteousness as basically legal, as 'right-standing', it is another matter. A standing or status can be conferred. The narrative says that God conferred this status on Abraham because of his faith. Paul uses this as his classic example of justification by faith. Abraham received his 'right-standing' not on account of any meritorious action but simply because he trusted God.

[29] Peter writes about the angels' intense desire to know something about this salvation:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**I Peter 1:10-12**).

[30] See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 21, where he points out that:

> The atonement was a satisfaction made to the divine law (legal) as well as a demonstration of God's love to change our hearts (moral). Salvation consists in a change in our standing before the law, which is called justification (legal), as well as a change in our state, which is called sanctification (moral).

[31]The following extract from Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 52, may explain more clearly the substitutionary work of Christ:

> The work of the Second Person of the Godhead was *substitutionary*. He lived for us a sinless life. He stood in our place in the judgment of God and was wounded for our transgressions. He rose again for our justification. And as our Representative, Substitute and Surety, He now presents the merits of His life and death on our behalf in the presence of the Father. These glorious redemptive acts are substitutionary. They were done for us. They were done outside us and without our effort or aid.

[32] Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA., 1980), 87.

[33] Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 78.

[34] **Second Corinthians 5:21**: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

[35] By "faith alone" I mean justification through faith on account of what Christ accomplished for mankind through His atonement. Man is passive and God is active in one's justification. The righteousness that God imputes to man through faith is "alien righteousness," that is, it is something given to man *in* and *through* Jesus Christ. God offers man salvation as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One is reconciled to God in and through Jesus. Faith is the earthen vessel, or channel, that conveys the treasure of Christ to sinful man.

[36] Robert Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA, 1980), 45.

[37] For an excellent and insightful analysis of the two aeons, see Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 16-37.

[38] See also **Romans 10:1-17**. Jesus is God's way of Righteousness, not works!

[39] Robert D. Brinsmead, *Justification*, 29.

[40] Robert Brinsmead seems to have fully assessed the Christ event. See Robert Brinsmead, *Justification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 63, where Brinsmead captures the Christ event:

> In no sense is God's gift of justification something done in man. We may correctly say that the righteousness of God in the Christ event is communicated to the believer by *imputation* (Rom. 4), but it is scandalous to say that it can be communicated to us by *impartation*

(infusion). The righteousness of God is a once-for-all event which took place two thousand years ago. Even God Himself cannot reenact it outside of us, to say nothing of doing it in us. But what Christ did He did as our Substitute. Therefore, His life was really our life, and His death our death. God counts them as ours. That is what justifies. Or to put it another way, what He did He did as our Representative, so that we lived and died and rose again in Him.

[41] See **Romans 10:1-3**. The Jews sought justification through obedience to law, not Jesus as God's way of salvation. It is not uncommon for Christians also to seek their "own righteousness," or justification before God, through complete understanding of the Word of God, not Jesus as God's appointed means of right-standing. Many Christians have a zeal for legitimate-standing before God, but not in agreement to God's plan of imputed righteousness based upon faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Today, among many believers in the Messiah, righteousness is pursued by exactness in knowledge and by perfection in obedience to a so-called "new law," that is to say, the New Testament Scriptures.

Flawlessness in knowledge is the battle cry; but freedom from error is not a condition of salvation, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by attainment to an assured ratio of knowledge, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by accomplishment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ. It is by belief of facts related to Him and not by grasp of abstract truth that one is justified before God. One's justification before God is neither by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When Christians postulate a program of justification by knowledge, then, they hang themselves on the very gallows they have constructed to rid themselves of others, unless they are prepared to make themselves even more ridiculous by affirming they know as much as God.

[42] No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. Every believer is "free from the law," but not above the law, see **Romans 7**. The law is given by God, and is an expression of His holy will. McGrath, *Justification **by** Faith*, 117, is especially helpful in this area when he writes:

The gift of our justification lays upon us the *obligation* to live in accordance with our new status. We are *made children* of God through our justification as an act of free grace -- and now we must act in accordance with this transformation. The slogan 'Become what you are!' neatly summarizes this situation and encapsulates the essence of Pauline ethics with some brilliance. In justification we are made to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:15-16): therefore we must shine out as lights in a dark world, as a city on a hill (v. 14; Phil. 2:15). Our justification brings about a new obedience—an obedience that would not be conceivable before our justification and that ultimately rests on the grace of God.

[43] Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith*, 76.

[44] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification**, 120.***

[45] See **Romans 4:5**, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Again, **Romans 5:1**, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ." Finally, **Romans 3:22**, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

> Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.[1]

LITERARY CRITICISM

This essay details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to understand more clearly as to whom the false prophets are that Jesus warns His disciples about. The phrase "false prophet" is employed from Matthew's Gospel in order to justify separation from other believers when viewpoints do not often agree. To accomplish this objective of identification of the false prophets, then literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist one in identifying the false prophets in the three different occurrences of the phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. This study draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by the God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This critical analysis reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

Since God's revelation is given in story form to His people, this form of communication enables them to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. One can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot

for an accurate description of the misleading instructors.[2] This detailed study is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. This literary exploration explores the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.[3]

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole. The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew[4] can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. Hayes and Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units."[5] When the reader posses questions about the literary placement of certain passages, he/she is able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps one to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists one in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.[6] He points out justly so that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."[7] Again, Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."[8] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text.[9] The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*[10] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. But, on the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.[11] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself."[12] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.[13] This chapter (4) is a narrative construction of Matthew's gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As one begins to read the narrative penned by Matthew, one is immediately made aware that there is a plot. Whenever one has a plot, one has a story.[14] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.[15] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.[16] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and

birth to death and resurrection."[17] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."[18] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.[19] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."[20] This arrangement of events is self-evident when one looks at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.[21] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story; in other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen one's understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

> The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice of arrangement (the order of happening) in presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.[22]

One cannot read Matthew's story[23] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (**1:1—4:16**); next, he describes indirect collision (**4:17—11:1**); then he pictures direct confrontation (**11:2—16:20**); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (**16:21—28:20**). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.[24]

In the development of plot, one recognizes the translating of characters into action.[25] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus.[26] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot.[27]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, one is immediately confronted with various evaluative points of view about the identity of Jesus.[28] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell.[29] There is a contrast in the book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. One also observes other points of view concerning the crowds. If one's point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in **Matthew 3:17** and **17:5**, then that individual is not thinking the things of God, but rather the things of men (**16:23**).[30]

As one peruses the book of Matthew, one cannot help but observe various points-of-view about Jesus?[31] One encounters Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (**chapters 1 and 2**). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus.[32] Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, one is confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

As one moves from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, one observes the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of the disciples did not think the things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men'" (**16:23**). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God's purpose for the salvation of mankind through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the various view points set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters' point of view coincides with that of God's. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew's history of salvation. This chapter will reveal that the religious leaders' point of view was in direct opposition to God's point of view. This rejection of God's point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew's gospel.[33] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus' identity [**1:1—4:16**];[34] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's repudiation of Jesus [**4:17—16:20**];[35] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [**16:21—28:20**].[36] It appears that Matthew employs a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment

one: "From that time on Jesus began to preach" (**4:17**) and with the beginning of section three: "From that time on Jesus began to explain" (**16:21**). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.[37]

It seems appropriate to analyze the book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist one in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As the reader advances through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows[38] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in **7:15**. In Part Two (**4:17—16:20**) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (**16:21—28:20**) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (**26:57-67; 27:32-55**).[39]

FIRST MAJOR SECTION: 1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to "present Jesus to the reader so that he/she will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is."[40] As one approaches this first section (**1:1—4:16**), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of **1:1—4:16.** For instance, the formula quotation in **Matthew 2:23** is linked to the formula quotation in **4:12-16** through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- "And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

- "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

Again, **Matthew** (**2:15**) informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- "Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

These three citations (2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15) along with the baptismal declaration (3:17) declare the unity of 1:1—4:16. The baptismal declaration reads: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This passage (3:17) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in 2:15. Also, 4:12-16 is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in 2:23. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (1:1—4:16) also foreshadows the false prophets

that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God's Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew unveils Jesus' identity. In this division, one finds the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew's story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased.[41] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For one to trace properly the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, one must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God's evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

Matthew's Evaluative Point of View

Matthew's point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God.[42] For example, in the prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (**1:21-23**).

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (**Isaiah 7:14**). This reference also discloses God's hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful man. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (**Matthew 1:1-17**). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel's history in the promises He made to Abraham (**Genesis 17:1-9**)[43] and David (**Isaiah 11:1**). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (**Matthew 1:12**) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (**1:1**). It is also significant that in this genealogy that Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (**1:1, 21**) also makes known God's point of view as well as Matthew's point of view.

The name Jesus is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the

personal name of the Messiah as Jesus (**1:16**), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (**1:20-21**). Matthew chronicles Joseph's response to the angel: "He gave him the name Jesus" (**1:25**). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, one discovers that God is active in Him for the salvation of mankind. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in **1:1** that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (**16:16**)—but also that he is "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham."

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (**1:1—4:16**) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ's rejection of Israel's leaders by recording Pilate's question to the chief priest and elders (**27:20**): '"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked" (**27:22**). Even the high priest in Jesus' final hours asked Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (**26:63**). Did Jesus refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: "Crucify him!" (**27:22**).

The Magi's Evaluative Point of View About Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is born "born King of the Jews" (**2:2**). This phrase, "king of the Jews," sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus' identity.[44] In fact, the rest of **2:2** reads: "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Immediately, in Matthew's story, one quickly observes the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi's evaluative point of view is in harmony with God's evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (**27:37**).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the "king of the Jews." Matthew records Pilate's question and Jesus' answer: "Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied" (**27:11**). Jesus response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus' crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (**27:37**).

Herod and the Religious Leaders' Point of View

Herod's evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God's. To illustrate Herod's point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew's prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him" (**2:13**). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the "chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law" (2:4) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: '"In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written'" (**2:5**). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns his disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**16:21**).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus' prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (**17:22-23**). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (**20:17-19**).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in **7:15** and **24:11,24**) in their final outrage against Him.

> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (**27:41-44**).

"He saved others" is reflective of **1:21**; "He's the King of Israel" is reflective of **2:2**; and "I am the Son of God" is reflective of **3:17**. The chief priest, the teachers of the law, nor the elders had the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist's Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist's evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (**Matthew 3:7-12**).[45] For example, Matthew captures John's graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:11-12**). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God's evaluative point of view.

Satan's Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (**4:3**).[46]

- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down" (**4:5-6**).

Satan expresses God's point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God's point of view about Jesus' purpose in coming (**4:1-11**). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (**16:21-23**).

Peter's Evaluative Point of View

Peter's evaluation of Jesus in **16:13-20** reflects God's evaluative point of view in **3:17**. Matthew highlights God's point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew's introduction—"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" [**3:13**]—one observes a dialogue between John and Jesus **(3:14-15**) and two revelatory events that follow (**3:16-17**). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan (**4:1-11**). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God's way of redemption. Later in Matthew's story (**16:21—28:20**) when Peter tried to prevent the atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (**4:1-12**).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Following this confession Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in

heaven" (**16:17**). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (**3:17**). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: "'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (**17:5**).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION: 4:17—16:20

Following Matthew's introduction to Jesus as Messiah (**1:1—4:16**), he embarks upon Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel (**4:17—11:1**).[47] Matthew calls attention to Jesus' ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (**4:17**). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (**9:36**). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (**12:34**). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (**3:7-8**).

JESUS' MINISTRY TO ISRAEL: 4:17—11:1

Jesus' Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus' ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (**5:20**), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the gospel (**4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). After Jesus learns of John's imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (**4:12**). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (**4:12-13**). During this period of time, He proclaims the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near (**4:17**). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (**4:18-20**); shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (**4:21-22**). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see **chapters 8 and 9**), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (**9:9-13**). Then, in chapter 10, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (**10:1-4**).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee "Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in **9:35** and **11:1**. The third summary of Jesus' ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (**4:25**). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (**4:24**), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him (**4:24-25**).

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (**5:1—7:28**). If one wants to understand what He taught (**4:23**), then one must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (**5:17-20**). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**7:28-29**). Just as in the first section of Matthew's story (**1:1—4:16**), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until **chapter 12**.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (**5:10-13**) whom He later described as false prophets (**7:15**). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**). This statement by Jesus echoes John's renunciation of the Pharisees (**3:7**) and the complicity of the teachers of the law with Herod (**2:4**).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (**5:21-48**) and acts of piety (**6:1-18**). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (**5:21a**), "But I tell you" (**5:22**). Jesus is not contradicting the law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the law. He is not nullifying the law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of

the law. If Jesus is abolishing the law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus' earlier statement:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**5:17-19**).[48]

Jesus' Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus' ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (**8:1—9:38**). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew's readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (**1:1—4:16**) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (**5:10-12**). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (**chapters 8 and 9** record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (**8:1-4**), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (**8:5-13**), cures Peter's mother-in-law (**8:14-15**), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (**8:16-17**). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle, namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (**8:23-27**). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (**8:28-34**).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (**9:1**). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (**9:2a**). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (**9:2b**). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the law. Again, one is reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**7:15**). These teachers of the law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (**9:3**). Suddenly in this ninth chapter, one witnesses conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, one should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

> "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men (**9:4-8**).

Not only does the second section (**4:17—16:20**) of Part One (**4:17-11:1**) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (**10:7-8**). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in **Chapter 10**, one beholds bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this **chapter (10**), Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (**10:16**). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (**10:17**). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (**5:10-12**).

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). In **4:17**, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is through this proclamation that Jews and Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God's gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God's kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan's Rules?

What does the "kingdom of heaven" mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, "the kingdom of heaven is near" (**3:2**), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, 'God with us'" (**1:23**). And in **12:28**, Matthew states Jesus' announcement: "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the good news about God's way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his

people from their sins" (**1:21**). The gospel is simply good news about God's way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this good news in a conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**John 3:16-21**).

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate **4:17—11:1** (part "A") as it does in **11:2—16:20** (part "B"). Part "A" of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders; in part "A" the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (**9:1-8**). In this first section, one is led to count on battle. In **4:17—8:34** Matthew forewarns the reader that he is to anticipate conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (**5:10-12**), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (**5:20**).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (**6:1-18**). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders' motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**7:28-29**). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (**8:5-10**) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (**8:11-12**).

Now in Chapter 9, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized; it is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of a paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" (**9:3**). They declare "to themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and

sinners in Matthew's home (**9:9-10**). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (**9:11**).

In **Chapter 10**, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (**10:1-15**). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (**10:16-39**). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**), now Jesus warns them about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach and to heal (**10:7,8,16**).[49]

In the first major section (**4:1—4:16**), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (**3:17**). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's point of view that Jesus is His Son (**3:17**) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (**4:3, 6**).[50] The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (**2:1-6**), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist who is supportive of Jesus (**3:7-12**).[51] In this first section, one comes away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, one, upon a closer reading, immediately grasps that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (**2:3-6**). Also one immediately grasps Jesus' eschatological judgment (**Matthew 24 and 25**) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:7-12**).

As stated above, the second major section (**4:17—16:20**) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (**4:17—11:1** and **11:2—16:20**). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**), rather than on the element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (**4:17**). But in this second section (**11:2—16:20**) of the second major division (**4:17—16:20**), one observes Jesus' anguish of Israel's

negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (**11:16-19**). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, one should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1—16:20

In part "B" of the second major section, the leaders' threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (**12:14**). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in **9:3**. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew's story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders' hostilities are no longer secretive (**9:1-8**), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation over the disciples' picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (**12:2-8**). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (**12:9**) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (**12:10**). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10	Matthew 12:38
Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"	Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2	Matthew 15:1-2
When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."	Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

In this second subdivision (part B), one observes the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in **12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9**. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (**12:14**). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (**12:22-37, 38-45**). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub Matthew 12:36-37	The Sign of Jonah Matthew 12:41-42

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.	The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in **Matthew 24 and 25**. This judgment is the same "coming wrath" that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (**3:7-12**): "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:12**). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (**13:36-43**):

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (**13:40-43**).

As stated above, the religious leaders' opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in **Matthew 12**, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (**12:14**). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are "evil" (**12:23, 39, 45; 16:4**), spiritually blind (**12:24, 38, 42; 16:3**), hypocritical (**12:10; 15:7; 16:10**), conniving (**12:14**), murderous (**12:14**), unfaithful to God (**12:39; 16:4**), unrepentant (**12:41**), and lawless (**15:3, 6**). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (**12:43-45**); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (**12:38; 16:1**). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (**4:17—16:20**), part B (**11:2—16:20**), one witnesses the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- **12:1-8** Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- **12:9-14** Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- **12:22-37** Healing Blind and Dumb Demoniac
- **12:38-45** Demand for a Sign

- **15:1-20** Eating with Defiled Hands
- **16:1-4** Second Demand for a Sign
- **16:5-12** The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus' ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major section (**1:1—4:16**), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:17**).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in **11:2—16:20** is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (**11:2-3**). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (**12:22-23**).

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in **1:1—4:16**. But in this second part, one is also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (**4:1—4:16**), as well as in part two (**4:17—16:20**), breaks into the world of Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (**3:17; 17:5**). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater detail, the third section (**16:21—28:20**). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about who the Son of Man is (**16:13**).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (**4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1**). But in spite all of this fame, one still observes conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (**4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (**9:3, 11, 34**). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (**11:2—12:50**). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (**2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42**). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (**11:16-19**). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (**11:20-21**), and Capernaum (**11:23-24**) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of

Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: "'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him" (**13:55-57a**).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (**14:1-2**). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (**14:3-11**). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (**14:24-33**), they all proclaimed: "Truly you are the Son of God." (**14:33**). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (**8:27**). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (**16:13-20**): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Peter's point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God's point of view (**3:17; 16:23a**). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (**16:13-14**).

In the second part (**4:17—16:20**), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (**4:17—11:1**) and of Israel's response to Him (**11:2—16:20**). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God's end-time rule (**5:1—8:1**). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (**9:3**). This section consists mainly of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**).

In the later part of Matthew's story, one observes a change (**11:2—16:20**). To all intents and purposes, Jesus' ministry is without success. In fact, Israel's response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (**12:1—8, 9—14; 15:1-9**). The leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (**9:34; 12:24**). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (**16:13-14**).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (**16:16; 14:33**). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence; they do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus' ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. But, on the other hand, His ministry, in the

sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION: 16:21—28:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus' prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**Matthew 16:21**). One observes that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary ("he must go" or "it is necessary," dei`). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (**1:21**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders' objective is destruction (**12:14**). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Prior to these predictions, one recalls Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (**16:16**). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples "not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (**17:9**).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (**16:22**). Peter still did not understand the atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (**4:10**). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, one finds three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:17**). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (**17:5**). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (**16:21**), but Peter says "no" (**16:22**). But on the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (**17:22-23**). One can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (**17:9**). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-48**).

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (**Matthew 20:17**). He took the disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (**20:18-19**).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (**21:1**). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (**21:9**). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to who this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (**21:11**). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (**21:13**). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (**21:12-13**). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (**21:12—23:39**).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (**21:15**)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (**21:23**)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (**22:15-16**)
- The Sadducees (**22:23**)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (**22:24-35**)

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

> "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions (**22:42-46**)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (**chapter 23**). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (**chapter 24**). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (**chapter 25**).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (**26:1-5**). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (**3:17; 17:5**). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (**26:1**). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as to what His death is all about: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**26:27-28**). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (**26:57-67**), before Pilate (**27:11-26**), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (**27:27-31**). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (**27:32-44**), the death of Jesus (**27:45-55**), the burial of Jesus (**27:57-66**), the resurrection of Jesus (**28:1-10**), the guards' report (**28:11-15**), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (**28:16-20**).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew's Gospel (**16:21-28:20**) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with **Matthew 16:21**, one observes an escalation of the "powers that be" to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (**27:20**). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to "Watch out for false prophets" (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**). The first warning followed Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders' theology (**Matthew 5—6**) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (**Matthew 23**) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

This essay has analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (**4:1—1:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21—28:20**) of Matthew's gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, one observes that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, one observes direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders' concept of God's righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders' characteristics (**chapter 24 and 25**). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A one observes, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B one observes an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section (**16:21—28:20**), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

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[1] Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

[2] See Ronald David Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

> Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks at a text, rather than through it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

[3] Ibid., 95.

[4] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[5] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

[6] Powell, *Criticism, 1-10.*

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Chapter 2, "The Crisis and Identification of False Prophets Within the Churches of Christ," for examples of not applying the principles of literary analysis in seeking to comprehend the false prophets passages. And, as a result of this loose interpretation, each division within the Churches of Christ claims the false prophets citations as their own exclusive ticket to defend their separation from other Christians.

[10] See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

> Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

[11] An example of this distinction is found in my article on The Passover Traditions in the First Century—where the *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knows about the Passover traditions in the first century [ON-LINE—available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 30 January 2001), located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, and then under the subheading LORD'S SUPPER. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

[12] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The

Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

[13] See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

> Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[14] See Witherup, " Cross of Jesus," 120, 139.

[15] Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story,* 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See also Bauer, "The Cross of Jesus," 62.

[20] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[21] Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[22] Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Plot" in *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

[23] See Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: "This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place).

[24] Forster, Novel, 86.

[25] See Bauer, "Structure," 26, where he comments on "plot":

> Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the "plot." Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[26] See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, 168.

[27] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[28] Ibid., 34.

[29] Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, "Discourse," 67.

[30] For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, S*tory,* 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph., D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[31] See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[32] Powell, "Leaders," 184.

[33] I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story*, for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[34] Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[35] This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17—11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2—16:20]; Witherup, The Cross of Jesus, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[36] Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[37] For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[38] Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[39] Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

[40] Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[41] For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

[42] See Kingsbury, *Story,* 35.

[43] "When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God'" (**Genesis 17:1-8**).

[44] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

[45] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[46] In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by ***ei*** ("if") with the indicative mood in the protasis (if clause) and almost any mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with ***ei*** ("if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with ***ean*** ("if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis (if clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God. . . ."

[47] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

[48] For a detailed study of the Old Testament and its relevance, see Dallas Burdette, "The Authority of the Old Testament: A Brief Summary of the Relevance of the Old Testament within the Christian Community" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 30 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[49] Jack Dean Kingsbury, ***Story***,

[50] Powell, "Leaders," 217.

[51] Ibid.

God the Initiator:

God Works in His People

Thrust Statement: **Man's salvation is God's creation.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 2:12-13**

> [12] Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:12-13**).[1]

This passage is a puzzle to many Christians. On the one hand, Paul says, "work out your own salvation"; but, on the other hand, he says, "it is God who works in you." Which is it? Is it both? Does man earn his salvation? Or is salvation God's initiative? These are questions that this study seeks to unravel. Just what is Paul saying to the Philippians? In the above Scripture reading, Paul brings us face to face with the practical questions of the Christian life. In other words, he is saying that one should work out his salvation to the finish—do not give up, do not faint, do not become discouraged. This passage is not a reference to one's attempt to earn one's salvation by works, but rather a reference to spiritual growth and development. Salvation expresses itself in the ongoing process in which the believer is involved.

This passage (**Philippians 2:12-13**) brings us to the very heart of the most practical questions that confront each Christian in his or her walk with the Lord. But before one embarks upon a detailed study of the implications of this Scripture, it would be helpful to look at this exhortation as a whole before one analyzes its component parts. To begin with, one's attention should focus upon the word "therefore" (᾽Ω]στε &wste) at the beginning of this verse (**12**). This word compels us to take this statement ("work out your own salvation with fear and trembling") within its context; the word "therefore" links this verse with the preceding verses, that is to say, what has gone before.

Paul appealed to the Philippians to live a life of holiness, to live a life of love, to live a life of forbearance, and to live a life of faithfulness to God—come what may. Paul wanted their conduct to be in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Messiah:

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (**Philippians 1:27-28a**).

Not only does the "therefore" take us back to **1:27**, but it also takes us back to where Paul exhorts the Philippians to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (**Philippians 2:3**). Paul relies upon the incarnation and resurrection of Christ to drive home his point of humility. He forcefully illustrates this:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross (**Philippians 2:5-8**)!

This example of Christ's humility furnishes a lesson for Christian unity. This deep love is the bond that binds the people of God. It is this model of unselfishness that causes God's children to labor toward the advancement of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Remember, Jesus expresses this kind of love to His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (**John 13:34-35**). It is this self-sacrificing love that induces Christians to make allowances for other believers. It is this extreme love that exhibits patience, toleration, and forgiveness. As the Philippians work out their salvation, it is to be done without discord or pomp. This admonition is as true today as it was in Paul's letter. As we, at Oakwood Hills Church of Christ, work out our salvation, it is my prayer that none of us will battle with one another. Yes, Paul is encouraging these Christians toward love. He loves them and they love him. It is very possible that they are discouraged by the fact that Paul is jailed in Rome. One wonders if the Philippians were saying within themselves, "without Paul we cannot live this Christian life."

It appears from the tone of the letter that Paul is saying, "Please don't imagine that my presence or my freedom is essential to your living the Christian life. Through the mercy of God, I proclaimed to you the gospel. God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed me to set you on your feet and, in a sense, establish your goings. You must not feel that everything is going down the tube; you must not feel that the work in Philippi is about to end because I am in prison and cannot come and proclaim the gospel to you." What about us at Oakwood Hills? Do the believers here also relate to the inner feelings of the Philippians? When Bob Lewis announced his departure, did any of you want to quit? Were you despondent? Can you identify with the Philippians? Are you experiencing turmoil within your soul?

Who is Bob Lewis, who is Dallas Burdette, who is Will Oldfield, who is Dennis Smith, who is James Hagan, who is James Hayes, who is James Ingle, and who is Tom Smith but servants of God. It is in this vein that Paul addresses the Corinthians:

> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds (**1 Corinthians 3:5-10**).

Bob Lewis built upon the foundation laid by someone else; Dallas Burdette is building upon the groundwork laid by someone else. Bob and I have one purpose; namely, to build upon the company of God's saints; it is God who gives the increase. Paul forcefully reminds the Philippians that it is not his presence that is essential; rather, it is God's closeness that is indispensable. For Paul, the One who is really necessary is God; the One who is important to you is with you. He wants them to understand that it is God who works in them, not Paul. Listen again to the words of Paul, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:13**). It is not Paul, but God that matters; it is not Bob Lewis, but God that matters; it is not Dallas Burdette, but God that matters. To the Philippians, he is saying in essence, "you must not feel that your labor in the Lord is for nothing." This admonition is also applicable to the saints at Oakwood Hills. The words of Paul to the Corinthian congregation are worth citing: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Everyone here is a minister of God. Everyone here is a servant of God. Everyone here is a minister of the proclamation of the good news of God. Everyone is to be actively engaged in kingdom work. Paul reminds the Corinthians as to what it is all about:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

God has committed to all of us this ministry of reconciliation. In the course of history, there have been times when all leaders were killed or destroyed. But since Christianity is about the love of God within the soul, it has continued. Christianity is a

personal possession of every true believer. My prayer is that God will continue to work in each of you. Do you remember how Paul began his letter to the Philippians? Listen as we read about his thanksgiving and prayer:

> I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (**Philippians 1:3-11**).

Salvation is a personal possession. In **Philippians 2:12-13**, Paul was not exhorting the Christians in Philippi to produce their own salvation, or to arrive at salvation, but rather to work the salvation that they already possessed through faith in Jesus. The New Testament writers never present salvation as something that individuals achieve through their own efforts, their own strivings, and their own endeavor. No! "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:13**). The writers of the New Testament talk about justification, sanctification, and glorification.

In closing this message, let me briefly set forth, what I consider, the major distinctions in these three words. First, when one is justified, God regards that one as guiltless; He forgives them in Christ; they are justified by faith. Justification is God clothing us with the righteousness of Jesus Messiah. Second, sanctification is that process which is going on within us; it is that which makes us more like Christ. Sanctification is continuous, whereas justification is God once and for all regarding us as sinless. Sanctification is Christ being formed within us; in other words, our nature is being purged and purified and cleansed and perfected. Sanctification is something in which you and I are active. Yes, Christians are to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (**Philippians 2:12**). Are you aware that God is working in you? Thank God for such a doctrine that assures us that in spite of all our sins and all of our unworthiness, God is still fashioning our lives. And, finally, glorification is the state beyond this life where the believer will stand with a perfect resurrection body face to face with God.

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless noted otherwise.

God Works in You

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> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (**Philippians 1:27-28a**).

Not only does the "therefore" take us back to **1:27**, but it also takes us back to where Paul exhorts the Philippians to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (**Philippians 2:3**). Paul relies upon the incarnation and resurrection of Christ to drive home his point of humility. He forcefully illustrates this:

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (**Philippians 2:5-8**).

This example of Christ's humility furnishes a lesson for Christian unity. This deep love is the bond that binds the people of God. It is this model of unselfishness that causes God's children to labor toward the advancement of the Lord's kingdom on earth. Remember, Jesus expresses this kind of love to His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (**John 13:34-35**). It is this self-sacrificing love that induces Christians to make allowances for other believers. It is this extreme love that exhibits patience, toleration, and forgiveness.

As the Philippians work out their salvation, it is to be done without discord or pomp. This admonition is as true today as it was in Paul's letter. As we, at the New Covenant Fellowship, work out our salvation, it is my prayer that none of us will battle with one another. Yes, Paul is encouraging these Christians toward love. He loves them and they love him. It is very possible that they are discouraged by the fact that Paul is jailed in Rome. One wonders if the Philippians were saying within themselves, "without Paul we cannot live this Christian life."

It appears from the tone of the letter that Paul is saying, "Please don't imagine that my presence or my freedom is essential to your living the Christian life. Through the mercy of God, I proclaimed to you the gospel. God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed me to set you on your feet and, in a sense, establish your goings. You must not feel that everything is going down the tube; you must not feel that the work in Philippi

is about to end because I am in prison and cannot come and proclaim the gospel to you." What about us at this congregation? Do the believers here also relate to the inner feelings of the Philippians? Are you ever despondent when things do not go right with the congregation? Can you identify with the Philippians? Are you experiencing turmoil within your soul?

Who is Debbie Stroud, who is Dallas Burdette, who is Karen Taylor, who is Donnie Newton, who is Moe Taylor, who is Billy Lohr, who is Mickey Brooks, and who is Gail Tauton but servants of God. It is in this vein that Paul addresses the Corinthians:

> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds (**1 Corinthians 3:5-10**).

Dallas Burdette builds upon the foundation laid by someone else; Lavone Burdette is building upon the groundwork laid by someone else. Lavone and I have one purpose; namely, to build upon the company of God's saints; it is God who gives the increase. Paul forcefully reminds the Philippians that it is not his presence that is essential; rather, it is God's closeness that is indispensable. For Paul, the One who is really necessary is God; the One who is important to you is with you. He wants them to understand that it is God who works in them, not Paul. Listen again to the words of Paul, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:13**). It is not Paul, but God that matters; it is not Buddy Bigelow, but God that matters; it is not Keith Martin, but God that matters. To the Philippians, he is saying in essence, "you must not feel that your labor in the Lord is for nothing." This admonition is also applicable to the saints at the New Covenant Fellowship. The words of Paul to the Corinthian congregation are worth citing: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Everyone here is a minister of God. Everyone here is a servant of God. Everyone here is a minister of the proclamation of the Good News of God. Everyone is to be actively engaged in kingdom work. Paul reminds the Corinthians as to what it is all about:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We

> implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

God has committed to all of us this ministry of reconciliation. In the course of history, there have been times when all leaders were killed or destroyed. But since Christianity is about the love of God within the soul, it has continued. Christianity is a personal possession of every true believer. My prayer is that God will continue to work in each of you. Do you remember how Paul began his letter to the Philippians? Take note as we read about his thanksgiving and prayer:

> I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (**Philippians 1:3-11**).

Salvation is a personal possession. In **Philippians 2:12-13**, Paul was not exhorting the Christians in Philippi to produce their own salvation, or to arrive at salvation, but rather to work the salvation that they already possessed through faith in Jesus. The New Testament writers never present salvation as something that individuals achieve through their own efforts, their own strivings, and their own endeavor. No! "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:13**). Not only is God the One who works in us, He is also the One who justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies. How does God justify His actions? Paul says that it is through Jesus (**Romans 3:21-31**). Once more, Paul says, " It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**).

What does justification, sanctification, and glorification mean? First, when one is justified, God regards that one as guiltless; He forgives them in Christ; they are justified by faith. Justification is God clothing us with the righteousness of Jesus Messiah. Second, sanctification is that process which is going on within us; it is that which makes us more like Christ. Sanctification is continuous, whereas justification is God once and for all regarding us as sinless. Sanctification is Christ being formed within us; in other words, our nature is being purged and purified and cleansed and perfected. Sanctification is something in which you and I are active. Yes, Christians are to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (**Philippians 2:12**).

Are you aware that God is working in you? Thank God for such a doctrine that assures us that in spite of all our sins and all of our unworthiness, God is still fashioning our lives. It goes almost without saying: one who belongs to the kingdom of

God is to bring his or her life into conformity with the ethical demands of the Gospel. The new reality (new creation) in Jesus must express itself in new forms of behavior (**Romans 6:18**). Christians must ever strive to manifest the kind of behavior that belief in the Gospel promotes—newness of life (**6:4**). Is Christ manifested in your behavior? Do you treat your wife with respect? Do you treat your husband with respect? Do you treat your children with respect? Do you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ with respect? Has the Gospel made a difference in your relationship with other individuals? Is God working in you? Are you merciful? Are you kind? Are you conscious that you owe your standing before God through His act of redemption in and through His Son Jesus? Is your faith real? If so, one will see Jesus in your actions. Every Christian is called to fulfill God's will. One cannot fulfill God's will by behavior that does not glorify God.

And, finally, glorification is the state beyond this life where the believer will stand with a perfect resurrection body face to face with God. Do you fail in sanctification in your daily walk with God? Yes, we all do! But the Good News from God is this: God in His wisdom made Jesus our SANCTIFICATION. The moment one is justified, he or she is also sanctified. The moment one is sanctified, he or she is also redeemed. Have you allowed the miracle of the Cross to change your life? Are you overwhelmed with the redeeming act of God in and through Jesus? Continuous sanctification in one's life results in an elimination of narrow, bigoted, harsh, and unlovely features in your relationship with others. When one mistreats his or her spouse, one mistreats Christ; when one mistreats his or her brother or sister in Christ, one mistreats Christ (**Matthew 25:31-36**).

If you lose sight of the Cross or if you take the Cross out of your focus, you will change your way of living beyond recognition as a believer in Christ. One must always remember that he or she is a channel of God's grace in the sense that God works in you to announce the Good News of His way of salvation in Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1**). Do your neighbors recognize Christ in you? Do your co-workers recognize Christ in you? Do your children recognize Christ in you? Does your spouse recognize Christ in you? How do you view yourself in your relationship with God? How do you look at the Church in God's scheme of redemption? Life in Christ becomes real when one faces his or her responsibilities in proclaiming God's grace and, at the same time, putting on behavior that glorifies God. When one comes to a realization that the Church is a Christian community, that is, a fellowship of persons living together, one will see greater harmony within the congregation and superior concord within family relationships. If one loses the concept of God working in each person, one loses his or her sense of direction.

CONCLUSION

Is your life full of troubles? Do you have trouble in your marriage? Do you have trouble in the Church? Are you persecuted for your faith in Christ? If so, is this a reason to flake off and go over the hill in desertion from your walk with God (**1 Corinthians 15:58**)? How did Paul respond to troubles in the lives of the Philippians? Paul sought to encourage the Philippians in spite of persecution. To do this, he reminds them that God is working in and through them in spite of their trials and tribulations. Since God is working in them, they must ever be conscious that their kingdom work should be done with fear and trembling. Christians must never give up. God works in

all of us in order to accomplish His objectives in reaching the lost. The grace that one receives from God must bear fruit to His glory and honor. This Epistle is about restoring the lost unity between worship and work. As you reflect upon this short Epistle, you immediately realize that God demands the whole of your life. One cannot compartmentalize his or her life into both religious and secular. For the believer, all of life is worship. The Christian community is not like human organizations; it is a business, not only for Sundays, but for weekdays as well.

As you reflect upon the Church, you should always keep in mind that the Church owes its existence to an act of God. The Church is not simply a human organization, but it is a community in which Jesus Christ is the living Lord. The Church is the witness and the continuing embodiment of the historical fact that God sent His Son so that both men and women might receive the adoption of sons and daughters. The Church is an inward fellowship of faith and love. The Church is the community of those who live by faith in God's promises. The Church of Jesus Christ is built from above, not from below; it has its source in God, not man. How do you view the Church? How do you view sin? How do you perceive your relationship with God? The Church is essentially a fellowship of persons, not an institution.

Are you rebelling against the teachings of God? One must always be conscious that God's way with both men and women is to lead them to repentance. God desires to deliver everyone from sin so that everyone may serve Him in newness of life. For one to be a Christian, one must undergo a complete change in mind, from the carnal to the spiritual. Repentance and conversion are the starting points of the Christian life. Once you are converted to Christ, you should remember that the work of evangelism is not something that can be accomplished by the person in the pulpit alone. Are you proclaiming the message of God's redeeming love? The Gospel was proclaimed not only in Word, but also in deeds. The whole life of the Christian is a worship of God. The early Christians understood their life to be one continuous act of worship. Christians are to go forth, not as rulers, but as servants of the Most High God. Are you a servant of God? Are you allowing God to work in you? Again, the words of Paul to the Philippians should be memorized:

> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:12-13**).

God Works in You

Thrust Statement: **We are to work out this amazing salvation God has given us with awe.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 2:12-13**

GOD'S ACT OF REDEMPTION: THE CROSS OF CHRIST

As you reflect upon God's salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus, do you stand in amazement of the Gospel of Christ? Are you conscious that the Gospel is about God's love for lost humanity? Does God's love take hold of you in Jesus? Do you rejoice at the radical message of free grace in and through His Son Jesus? Are you mindful that God's love is greater than the sins of humanity? What does salvation mean to you? One cannot read the Word of God without a realization of God's wrath. Is the wrath of God a reality to you? Are you aware of the fact that God's wrath is not God's essence, but rather that His love is His essence—God is love. God Himself has provided the decisive safeguard for the salvation of both men and women—the Cross of Jesus is the event.

John, in his Gospel, discloses that God's revelation is a coming down to man in and through His Son Jesus (**John 1:1-14**). God enters space and time, that is to say, He enters the world of sinful history in the Incarnation. It is through Jesus that one receives the atoning forgiveness of sins. God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The revelation of God is seen in the Cross. It is on the Cross that Jesus tasted the full sense of remoteness from God—"My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46**). One cannot reconstruct the bridge that separates God from humanity; only God can bring about this reconciliation (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). It is through the Cross of Jesus that God makes known His holiness and His love simultaneously. Do you stand in awe of the salvation that God has made available through the Cross? Are you conscious that God concretizes forgiveness in the Incarnation, which is a historical event? Forgiveness is found in an objective

atonement (crucifixion), not subjective atonement (speaking). It is only in Christ that one sees the burden of guilt.

In the subjective versus objective sense of salvation, one discovers the cost to God—the giving of His "one and only Son" (**John 3:16**). There is a distinction between Christianity and the religions of the world. One can say that speaking alone is not enough for God; otherwise, God's holiness and justice would be mocked. The cost to God to maintain His holiness and redemption for sinful humanity is found in the Cross of Calvary. It is only at the Cross that men and women see what separates humanity from God. In the Cross, one perceives that the limitless mercy of God transcends all human standards (**Ephesians 2:4-7**). What is the Gospel of God about? It is about reconciliation. In Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch, he goes right to the heart of reconciliation:

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39] Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses (**Acts 13:38-39**).

Since salvation is by grace through faith in His Son Jesus (**Acts 10:34-43**), is it any wonder that Paul wanted the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling? When one understands what it cost God to bring about redemption, one must stand in admiration of God's love. Christians are now a part of the new heavens and the new earth (**Revelation 21:1-2**). What does this position in Christ mean to you? What does it really mean to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling? Is Paul teaching that one earns his or her salvation through works? How do you view salvation? Is salvation by works or is salvation by grace? What is Paul exhorting the Philippians to do? Does "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**) contradict what Paul says to Titus?

> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (**Titus 2:4-7**).

Paul speaks of working out one's salvation in **Philippians 2:12**, but in **Titus 2**, he speaks not of working out one's salvation, but rather of God's initiative in one's salvation. Paul is writing to individuals in Philippi that were already Christians. In other words, salvation is something they already possessed through God's mercy. Is there a case for one's own exertion in good works? Grace does not make one frivolous and idle. Christ has been given in order that a transformation may come about in one's life. This new life in Jesus is not intended to be merely inward, but rather the new life in Christ is to manifest itself outwardly in good works and faithfulness to the Gospel of God. Even though one is saved by grace through faith, nevertheless, Paul does not discount "good works" as necessary for the believer? No! Good works are things God ordained before the foundation of the world. Paul goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Ephesians 2:10**). Prior to this

call to the Ephesians for "good works," Paul clearly advances salvation by God's grace. Again, he goes right to the root of redemption:

> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:4-9**).

Paul desires that in the inner life of every believer that the Lord comes to birth. In other words, Paul desires that Christ be formed in them. Throughout his Epistles, Paul includes exhortations for domestic life. One cannot read the Epistles or the Gospels without a consciousness that the radical claims of God are as valid today as they were then. As one reflects upon Paul's letter to Titus, one sees how Paul forcefully draws attention to good works in the scheme of redemption following one's salvation by God's grace:

> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**Titus 3:8**).

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, makes a practical appeal to good works based on the Gospel of God's grace (**Philippians 1:3-9**). In other words, he sets forth the scheme of redemption and then calls for conduct that will glorify God. He wants the Philippians to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**). Earlier in this Epistle, Paul discusses partnership with God in the Gospel and God working in them:

> I thank my God every time I remember you. [4] In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, [6] being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (**1:3-4**).

Because of one's partnership in the Gospel, then one's behavior does matter to God: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (**Philippians 1:27**). Throughout the Epistles of Paul, he lays down the principles of Christian living. God has put the feet of the converted in a new direction. Christians are no longer to live for themselves, but to God. How can one live a life of defiance of God's grace? The Sermon on the Mount demands that every believer submit himself or herself to the unconditional will of God. Christians are to bear witness to the kingdom of God in their daily walk with Him as well as their testimony about God's Way of salvation in and through Christ. When one accepts Christ as Lord in his or her life, this acceptance of a new life in Christ means a redemptive life which leavens the framework of the society within which one lives.

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Two Masters

How can anyone appropriate the gift of redemption, and, at the same time, live a life that is totally opposed to the teachings of Jesus? One cannot serve two masters (God and money) at the same time (**Matthew 6:24**). One must begin to see his or her life as life that works for the kingdom of God. When one really understands the cost of redemption, one will become a missionary to everyone he or she meets. When one really understands redemption, one's priorities will never be the same. When one grasps the Cross of Jesus, one will seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (**6:33**). What is first in your life? Is it pleasure? Is it money? Is it your family? Is it God? Is God last in your priorities? God reaches out to fallen humanity in and through the Cross of Jesus. Humanity is fast stuck in the mire of hopelessness, but God comes to both men and women in the Incarnation and through the Cross. This reflection upon God's activity in one's salvation is Paul's characteristic way of making an appeal for conduct and ethical behavior.

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 1:11-15**).

When one is in Christ, the motives of greed, aims of self-seeking, evils of malice, obstacles of resentment, problems with drugs, evils of alcohol, difficulties with adultery and fornication, dilemmas with relationships (in the family as well as outside the family), and attitudes of rudeness are put aside. Paul sets forth the works of the flesh that one should cast off:

> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. [3] For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. [6] Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.[b] [7] You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. [8] But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. [9] Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (**Colossians 3:1-10**).

In one's new relationship, these things cease to exist as a part of one's walk with Christ. Christians are to exemplify Christ in their every day behavior. Christians are to carry out the Master's work of reconciling both men and women unto God through Jesus. A consciousness of the Cross of Jesus as a Divine act of reconciliation should awaken in everyone a sense of awe, or adoration. As stated above, Jesus, in His death upon the Cross, tasted the full sense of remoteness from God (**Matthew 27:46**). It is not uncommon for Paul to lay down "grace" first, and then say, as it were, "If you believe this, then, cannot you see that this redemption inevitably necessitates a change in one's life style." In the **Book of Romans**, Paul calls attention to this new behavior that Christians are to manifest in their daily walk with God:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [2] By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? [3] Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. [5] If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. [6] For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— [7] because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. [8] Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. [10] The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. [11] In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. [13] Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. [14] For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:1-14**).

He does not confront individuals with a way of life, and then say, "Go and live it." But rather, Paul tells them about the things that have been done for them, and then says, "Now then—go and live it." God Himself has done what is necessary for one's salvation. Christianity is not so much a belief in an idea as it is a belief in an act—the death of Christ upon the Cross. It is the act of God in redemption that has changed the whole relationship between humanity and God. God came to men in love and suffered so that both men and women could be united with each other and with Him. As you make this transition from doctrine, that is to say, the Good News about salvation in Jesus, there is always a "therefore" (**Philippians 2:12**). There is a logical sequence from doctrine to behavior. Every believer must take up his cross and follow Jesus daily (**Matthew 16:24**).

What does it mean to "work out your salvation" (**Philippians 2:12**)? Are you working out your salvation? Have you examined your own life (**2 Corinthians 13:5**)?

There comes a time when one may need a second conversion, that is to say, a renewal of one's commitment to the kingdom of God (see **Revelation 3:14-22**). Where do you stand in your relationship with God? Have you lost your heightened sense of emotional response to God? Where do you stand in your relationship with God? Are you stronger today than you were six months ago? Many Christians do not have a spiritual history, that is to say, many Christians at age sixty are where they were at age twenty-five. Is there a great deal of arrested development in your spiritual life? Do you desire the things of God more than you desire the things of the world (see **2 John 2:15-17**)? How do you view sin? If you knew that Jesus was coming next week, would there be a change in your devotion to the things of God (**2 Corinthians 13:3**)? If the doctors were to tell you that you only have one year to live, what changes would you make in your spiritual life? Would you still use Sunday as a day to hunt? Would you still use Sunday as a day to visit relatives? Would you still use Sunday as a day to go to the lake? Would you still use Sunday as a day to make more money?

Before one can work out his or her own salvation, one must see his or her sinfulness, his or her allegiance to God, and his or her need of divine help. The Philippians, too, realized that they were sinners saved by grace. They also were conscious that at one time they were under the wrath of God; they were aware that at one time they were under the dominion of sin; they were mindful that at one time they were under the curse of the law; and they were cognizant that at one time they were under condemnation. They knew that at one time they were guilty in the sight of God. They had heard and believed the Good News of the Gospel, that is to say, God sent His only begotten Son to die in order to make atonement for them. Now it is time to produce fruit worthy of repentance (see **Matthew 3:7-10**). What kind of fruit is there in your life?

Work Out Your Salvation

"Working out your salvation" simply means that one is to achieve, to bring to pass, and to lead a life that results in "good works"—works that gives pleasure to God. One must now work on the salvation given to him or her through faith in Jesus. Just as John the Baptizer exhorted the religious leaders to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (**Matthew 3:8**), so must every believer work out his or her salvation with awe and reverence. One must submit himself or herself entirely to God. What kind of works or fruit is involved in the works that Paul speaks of in the Philippian letter? To begin with, let us reflect upon the words of Jesus in the healing of a man born blind:

> As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (**John 9:1-5**).

Partial or Unlimited Devotion?

As one reflects upon the work of God in one's life, one must be mindful that in Christ there is no such thing as partial devotion. Just simple devotion to Christ is not

enough. In other words, devotion must be unlimited and unconditional. When one loves Jesus, there is complete and unreserved commitment to the ways of God (**Matthew 22:37-40**). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, sets forth the necessity of good works. In calling attention to fruit production in their lives, He also informs His disciples that they too are the "light of the world." It appears that *works* and *light* go together. Jesus proclaims ethical behavior for his followers:

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men**.** You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

When one makes a commitment to Christ, one cannot remain what he or she was before conversion; one must go forward or perish. When God calls men and women to be His partners, He desires their corporation in the whole range of their human activities. Christians are called out of the world only to be sent back into the world to bring about the transfiguration of the world to God's glory. When one withholds his or her allegiance to God, one weakens his or her influence for the community of the redeemed. When the world sees you, does the world see Christ and your commitment to the society that He founded? Where are your priorities? Has the new life of God broken into your life? Again, Jesus speaks of working for the food that endures for eternal life:

> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (**John 6:27-29**).

To believe on the One whom God sent is to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling. The new reality in Christ must express itself in new forms of behavior that will glorify God. To be a Christian is to undergo a complete change of mind, from the carnal to the spiritual. What does your new life in Christ mean to you? Do you really believe in the One whom God sent? Has your mind and heart been opened to the message of God's grace that comes through Jesus Christ. Are you aware that you are the channel of God's grace to the world? God has placed His message in earthen vessels to proclaim the Good News of salvation to a lost and dying world (**2 Corinthians 4:7**). Has God's grace made a difference in your ethical behavior and your willingness to preach the Gospel? Have you presented your body as a sacrifice to God? What Paul told the Philippians to do concerning kingdom behavior is also set forth in his letter to the Romans:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and

approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

How does one present his or her body a living sacrifice? Is it through rituals or through ethical behavior? Is it through producing good fruit in one's way of life? Immediately upon calling upon the Roman Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, Paul catalogues a number of characteristics that exemplify Christ in their lives:

> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:9-21**).

This is what it means to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. We have been given a new start; we have been given a new nature. Salvation is set before us. We need to read the Word of God; we need to pray; we need to share salvation; we need to proclaim redemption. Just as David, the psalmist, expresses his gratitude for God's kindness, so must every believer allow gratefulness on his or her lips. David exclaims:

> I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly (**Psalms 40:8-10**).

The believer loves the Word, lives the Word, and preaches the Word. Do you desire to do the will of God? Do you proclaim God's righteousness? Do you hide His righteousness in your heart? Do you conceal God's love and truth? Are you a silent Christian? Does your inner being rejoice in God's law? Every Christian makes known the wonders of God's love through His Son Jesus. It is in this same vein of David's delight with the law that Paul, too, cries out: "in my inner being I delight in God's law" (**Romans 7:22**). Where is your delight? Where is your happiness? Where is your enjoyment? Is it in Christian ministry? Is it in the Word of God? Is your life in harmony with the law of God? Or is your life out of harmony with the law of God? Where are you? How do you stand? How do you measure up to God's standard? The

first chapter in the Book of Psalms sets forth the distinction between the godly and the ungodly. Which section of this Psalm do you fall into—godly or ungodly? This psalm is one that every Christian should memorize. Listen to the Holy Spirit:

> [1] Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. [2] But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. [4] Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. [5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. [6] For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish (**Psalms 1:1-6**).

Since God clothed you with His righteousness, are you devoting yourself to God? Are you consecrating yourself to prayer? Are you dedicating yourself to ministry? Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with these words:

> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (**Colossians 4:2-4**).

Are you praying for the advancement of God's kingdom? Are you proclaiming the message of redemption? Are you working and praying for unity among God's people? Do you have concern for those who live outside your familiar orthodox boundaries?

CONCLUSION

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:9-10**). Are you working and praying for God's will to "be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Has the sense of God disappeared from your life? Are you guilty of not working out this amazing salvation with fear and trembling that God has given? What does "fear and trembling" mean to you? Negatively, it does not mean that one works out his or her salvation in the sense of earning one's salvation. But rather, this working is in the spirit of admiration. In other words, the believer with humility and holy reverence works out his or her salvation in the spirit of wonder and amazement at such love; it is a holy vigilance and circumspection and alertness at the wonder of it all. The Christian constantly offers up a sacrifice of praise. Remember the words of the Hebrew writer as he encourages sacrifice of praise for redemption:

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (**Hebrews 13:15-16**).

With every believer, it is, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (**Psalms 40:8**). Just as David could not seal his lips (**Psalms 40:10**)

about God's righteousness, God's faithfulness, God's salvation, or God's love, so, too, every Christian shares the Good News of God's righteousness made available through faith in His Son Jesus. Jesus is God's righteousness for everyone who believes (**Jeremiah 23:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:30**). One cannot seal his or her lips about God's righteousness made available through faith in Jesus. Paul sets forth this righteousness from God in rapturous language to the Romans:

> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:22-26).**

Jesus is God's faithfulness. It is in Jesus that one finds hope. It is in Jesus that one discovers security. One cannot seal his or her lips about God's faithfulness. Paul writes,

> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:38-39**).

In **Romans, chapter 5**, Paul speaks of freedom from the "wrath" of God through Jesus our Lord. He goes right to the heart of salvation. It is not in man, but it is in Jesus. Again, one cannot seal his or her lips about freedom from God's wrath in Jesus. One cannot seal his or her lips about God's reconciliation in Jesus. Jesus is God's salvation for lost humanity:

> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (**Romans 5:9-11**).

Thus, like David, when one thinks of Him, one does not seal his or her lips; nor does one cease to do His will. In closing this message, one should reflect upon the words of the Hebrew writer:

> May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever (**Hebrews 13:20-21**).

a Some manuscripts *our*

b Some early manuscripts *coming on those who are disobedient*

a Or *be rendered powerless*

God Works Through You

Thrust statement: **God works through individuals to accomplish His objectives.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 1: 3-6;**

A consciousness of God's work "in you" will alter one's reaction to the good news of salvation made available through Christ. This awareness will not only affect our outlook toward evangelism, but it will also affect the way we react toward others. Are you conscious that God works through you to accomplish His objectives—the salvation of men and women? Are you sharing your faith in Christ with others? What do you do to promote unity among God's people? Do you make allowances for other believers? Do you forgive others as you wish God to forgive you? Are you a professional faultfinder? What does it mean to you to be called a "servant" of the Lord Jesus? Are you aware of your calling into the service of God? Do you love others as Christ has loved you (**John 15:12**)?

Do you live a life worthy of the calling you have received (**Ephesians 4:1**)? Are you humble, gentle, and patient with other believers (**4:2**)? Do you bear (make allowances) with other Christians in love (**4:2**)? Do you do everything in your power to keep the Spirit's unity (**4:3**)? How can believers respond positively to their calling? The answer lies in a perception of God working through each individual to achieve his purpose. This realization of God's activities in His people should assist one in his or her behavior.

We are servants of God. We are saints of God. As "saints" in Christ Jesus, God calls everyone into His service. For Paul, the whole Christian community, not just the Philippians, is called into mission and ministry. Perhaps, the key verse in the entire **Philippian** letter is found in **verse 6** of the **first chapter**: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." [1] Apparently, the Philippians were having second thoughts about their place in God's kingdom, especially with the persecutions encountered because of their faith. Thus, Paul seeks to

nip-in-the-bud any defection of disloyalty or misunderstanding as to the nature of their work:

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel [28] without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (**Philippians 1:27-28**).

Prior to this statement, as noted above, Paul issues one of the most profound theological statements found in this short epistle: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (**1:6**). This statement is still true today. God is still working in the lives of His saints. God has begun a work with the saints in the New Covenant Fellowship at the Ramada Inn in Montgomery, Alabama. Everyone who is a part of this community of believers must never forget that it is God working in each person in order to accomplish His objectives.

Just as the Philippians, we, too, have doubts, from time to time, about our Christian ministry, especially when Christians are too quick to criticize other believers. Not only do believers frequently disapprove of other believers, but also they often cease to work with the local body of believers in which they are associated because of their disapproval of someone else. Yet, in spite of what others do, we must remind ourselves that it is God who has begun a good work in us. Every Christian must keep his eyes upon Jesus, lest he or she becomes weary and discouraged. It is in this same vein that the author of Hebrews writes:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. [2] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (**Hebrews 12:1-3**).

Paul, at the time of the writing of **Philippians**, was incarcerated in Rome. Yet, in spite of this set back, Paul was conscious that God was still accomplishing His goals through him. Paul mentions this concept in the beginning of this short Epistle (**1:6**) and again in (**2:13**). He did not want the believers to give up, in spite of troubles—persecution, haughtiness, and disunity. In fact, he states: "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**2:12**). Paul is saying that Christians should "work out" their salvation, not "work for" their salvation.

A works type salvation is not taught. Listen to Paul once more as he calls attention to the role of God in one's salvation: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**2:13**). It is God working "in you," not the reverse. God has a special purpose for each person to fulfill. God wants every Christian to "work out" his or her salvation; that is to say, one should put into practice the things of God in his or her daily walk. One must never forget that the ultimate ground and basis of one's salvation is God.

A consciousness of God working in us should help to eliminate disunity and pride among God's people. One also witnesses disunity and pride within the congregation at Philippi (**2:1-11; 4:2**). Sometimes we also experience disunity and pride within the local congregation that we assemble with on a weekly basis. If God is working in each believer, and He is, one must eliminate disunity and pride, which will destroy one's influence for the cause of Christ. What kind of attitude do we have toward God's people? Do we have fellowship with the Spirit? Are we united with Christ? Do we have comfort from the love of Christ? Do we consider others better than ourselves? Do we look out for our own interest? Or do we look out for the interest of others?

Do we have the mind of Christ in our relationship with the members here at the New Covenant Fellowship? Between the two statements of Paul about God working "in you" (**1:6; 2:13**), he sandwiches in his remarks about one's attitude toward other Christians by calling on the attitude of Christ to be emulated among each saint. If God is working "in you," then your focus about relationships with other believers should be high on your agenda. Pay attention to Paul as he centers in on the motives behind his admonition about humility and acceptance of others:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**2:1-11**).

Even though Paul addresses pride and disunity within this Epistle, it appears, so it seems, that his primary purpose is to encourage the Philippians in the face of persecution to keep on working to carry out an evangelistic ministry of reaching out to the lost. Paul is aware that God is going forward through the members of the church in Philippi. When one understands God's plan of salvation, one will be able to maintain courage and confidence—it is God working "in you." Why do Christians falter in their ministry? Is it not because of failure to grasp this central doctrine of "God working in you"? Failure to understand this teaching results in discord among God's people. One cannot build up the body of Christ without recognition of this magnificent statement—"God working in you." In every believer the work of God is being done. How did Paul view the work at Philippi? How does God view the work of this congregation—New Covenant Fellowship?

Paul founded this congregation (Philippi) on his second missionary journey. This second missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas began as they traveled through the province of Galatia in order to give the churches assistance that they established on the first missionary journey. Once again, one witnesses the work of God in their missionary activities. Paul and his companions decided to go south to Asia Minor, but the Spirit of God did not allow them to go (**Acts 16:6**). After this rejection by the Holy Spirit, Paul decided to go North, but again the Holy Spirit interfered (**16:8**). Thus, they went East and stopped at Troas (**16:8**). While waiting at Troas, Paul received a vision in which he was told to go to Europe (**16:9-10**).

Upon their arrival in Europe, Paul and Silas and Timothy (**16:1-3**) visited Philippi (**16:12**). His first convert was a woman named Lydia (**16:11-15**). His second convert, as far as we know, was a girl whom Paul cast out a demon (**16:16-18**). His third convert was a Philippian jailor (**16:19-34**). One cannot read these various accounts of Paul's ministry without recognition that God worked through Paul and his companions to bring about these conversions. God worked through Paul, Silas, and Timothy to accomplish His mission. God worked through these men to lead women and men to Christ.

Sometime earlier, following Paul's first missionary journey, Paul was in Jerusalem. As he related the missionary activities of himself and Barnabas to the assembled body, he attributed all of their activities to God. For example, in relating the story of the work that he and Barnabas had accomplished throughout the province of Galatia, he emphasized that in this work of conversions that God worked through them. Listen to Luke as he recounts this work: "On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (**14:27**). God worked through them and God opened the door of faith.

They were instruments of God. We, too, are instruments of God to accomplish His work of conversion. Is it any wonder that Paul wrote to the Philippians that God works "in you"? Paul did not initiate the work, God did; Paul did not create the vision, God did; Paul did not open Lydia's heart, God did—"the Lord opened her heart" (**16:14**). Even as one reflects upon the conversion of the Philippian jailor, one cannot help but observe that the earthquake that jarred opened the doors to the jail was not the work of Paul, but rather it was the work of God (**16:25-29**). In another prison epistle, Paul again stresses the role of God in the salvation of men and women:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

For Paul, God does not just initiate the work, but rather, God continues to work in the lives of men and women for the furtherance of His Gospel. Christianity is the result of God's action and activity. The church is the place where God is working in the hearts of men and women. The Trinity brings about salvation. God the Father initiates, God the Son performs; and God the Holy Spirit applies. It is, no doubt, in this same vein that Jesus speaks of the Trinity in His baptism: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (**Matthew 3:15**). The pronoun "us" appears from the context to refer to the Trinity, not to Jesus and John the Baptist. John is not included in the "us."

The moment Adam and Eve sinned, God took the initiative and promised the Messiah who would take away the sin of the world (**Genesis 3:15;** see also **Ephesians**

1:3-14). As one reads the story of Adam and Eve, one quickly discovers that the moment man and woman fell that God began the process of salvation. God did not stop with His interaction with Adam and Eve. Later, He chose one man—Abraham—through whom the Messiah would come and redeem humanity. God created a nation out of Abraham—the nation of Israel. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, expresses it this way: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). God's actions are ever present in the scheme of redemption.

Since God works in each of us, then one should remember that actions are to be actions that bring glory to God. Paul writes: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near" (**Philippians 4:5**). Are you gentle? Are you argumentative? Are you factious? Do you love? Are you concerned about the things of God? Paul bemoaned the conditions of some:

> For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (**3:18-19**).

How do you treat other Christians in your daily walk with God? Do you mind earthly or heavenly things? Do you live as an enemy of the cross of Christ? Are you an enemy of the cross of Christ? Are you pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (3:14)? Do you proclaim to be a Christian and yet refuse to submit your life to God? Are you fully committed to God and Christ and the Holy Spirit? Do you have an appetite for the things of God? Do you meet with God's people on Sundays? How do you measure up to the words of Paul in his final admonition to the Philippians? Listen to him as he pleads:

> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. [9] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (**4:8-9**).

Paul is saying that if you have experienced the new birth, then Christ should be all-absorbing in your thinking. You are no longer to just live for self; your talents and your possessions belong to God. Your life must be one of commitment. James, our Lord's brother, expresses it this way:

> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. [18] But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do (**James 2:17-18**).

If your life does not issue in good works, you are an "enemy of the cross of Christ." If your life is not devoted to Christ, you are an "enemy of the cross of Christ." If you do not love your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are an "enemy of the cross of Christ." The world will judge one's faith by his or her works. Christians must remember that "faith" alone saves, but the "faith" that saves is not alone. True faith will work itself out so that those around us will be able to tell that we are different. When one is saved by grace, he or she does not just sit around and twiddle his or her thumbs. Biblical faith produces good works (**Philippians 4:8-9**). What motivates

Christians to devotion to Christ in their everyday lives? It is faith in Christ that motivates Christians on to good works (**Titus 2:11-12**).

CONCLUSION

Are we allowing God to work in us? Why are there doubts about our Christian ministry? Perhaps, it is a failure to grasp this great theological doctrine of Paul's Epistle: "That he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 1:6**). How does Paul view his work among the Philippians? It is God working through Paul. How does Paul view the Philippians' work? It is God working "in you." For Paul, the Philippians did not start the work, God did. What is Christianity? It is God in the lives of men and women "in and through" Christ. We are God's theater. We are God's actors. We are God's workmanship. It is God who began this work.

Do you hate sin? Do you want to serve God? Are you willing to defend the Gospel? If so, then this is a good sign that God is working "in you." The Philippians desired to meet with God's people in order to discuss the things of God and to evangelize the lost more than anything else in the world. Does the church mean anything to you? Are you aware of the fact that the church is the community of those who have been forgiven of their sins? Are you conscious of the Scripture in which God exhorts His disciples not to abandon the assembling of themselves together (**Hebrews 10:25**)? Remember, we were chosen in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (**Ephesians 1:4**). The philosophy of the Philippians can be summed up in the words of Jesus:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [40] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:37-40**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

How Can Christians Rejoice in Times of Troubles?

Thrust statement: **Christians rejoice because of their position in Christ Jesus.**

Scripture reading: **Philippians 3:3; 4:4**

As one contemplates the tragedies that frequently occur in the lives of individuals, one can understand sadness that often devastates one's ability to rejoice. Sickness frequently ravages one's outlook concerning one's spiritual well being. A catastrophic illness can plunge one into a state of depression that is difficult to overcome. The death of one's loved one often sends one over the edge—even to the point of suicide. When one experiences marital problems, it is not uncommon for individuals to take their own lives. Financial ruin often leads to suicide. How can one rejoice in the face of such seemingly insurmountable heartbreaks in life?

Troubles are a part of life. No one is exempt. Jesus, in His conversation with Mary over the death of her brother, Lazarus, was moved with compassion as he witnessed the weeping of Mary and the Jews. John expresses the emotional trauma that Jesus experienced as He saw the sadness in Mary and the Jews: "Jesus wept" (**John 11:35**). Even though Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were close personal friends of Jesus, this fact, in and of itself, did not spare them from the normal experiences of day-to-day life. One cannot read about the tension in Job's life when he lost it all—children, live stock, and health—without being impressed with his firmness of faithfulness toward God.

Just how are Christians to react in the face of disturbances in one's daily routine? For an answer to this question, Paul's Philippian letter (ca. 61 BCE) is called forth to illustrate in a very concrete way how Christians should view difficulties in their lives. Paul called upon the Philippians to rejoice: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you" (**Philippians 3:1**).[1] Does this sound strange? If one is confined to

prison, as Paul was at the time of writing this epistle, one wonders how Paul could tell the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord." It is worthy of notice that this confinement was not the same as his last confinement (Mamertine dungeon) while waiting for his execution in Rome (**2 Timothy**). This time, while in Rome, Paul was allowed his own house in Rome (**Acts 28:14-31**).

Again, in the fourth chapter, Paul calls upon the Philippians to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (**4:4**). Paul wrote this letter to teach the Philippians how to "rejoice in the Lord." But even before Paul issues these imperatives, he relates his own predicament as events in which God is still glorified. Just how did Paul envision his own incarceration? Well, listen to Paul as he sets the stage for his imperatives—"rejoice" (caivrete, cairete, "rejoice, be glad"):

> [12] Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. [13] As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. [14] Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly (**Philippians 1:12-14**).

For Paul, he reveled in the fact that his incarceration served to advance the Gospel of Christ. But, in addition, there was another side benefit—brothers were encouraged to speak God's Word "more courageously and fearlessly." Paul did not allow misfortune to deter him in his objective of proclaiming the good news of God. He did not say, "woe is me," but rather, he states emphatically his outlook on life, in spite of persecution: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**1:21**). Not only did Paul suffer from those outside the body of Christ, but he also endured verbal abuse from others who preached Christ. Yet, regardless of the allegations made against him, he could still rejoice in the preaching of Jesus—even if from bad motives. Paul writes:

> [15] It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. [16] The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. [17] The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. [18] But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice (**1:15-18**).

There is a tendency, often times among believers, of jealousy and envy. One must constantly be on guard against the works of the flesh. Also, it is not uncommon for Christians to favor one brother to the exclusion of another. One of the most frequent complaints that individuals make is in regard to clicks within the body of Christ. This is not something new; it is old. Paul deals with this mentality in the Corinthian church:

> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. [11] My brothers, some

> from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. [12] What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." [13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**)

Today, Christians still witness similar concerns within the body of Christ. Do we agree with one another in order to be "united in mind and thought" concerning the body of Christ? Do we quarrel with one another? Do we despise one another? Do we love one another as Christ loves us? The Christians in Corinth were not the only ones that suffered from the works of the flesh. For example, in the Philippian letter, Paul calls attention to two sisters who are at one another's throats. He says,

> [2] I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. [3] Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (**Philippians 4:2-3**).

What is the antidote for such behavior? For Paul, it is the incarnation—God becoming flesh. Disunity threatened the Christians at Philippi. This is still true today in every body of believers. It is not uncommon for Christians to war with one another. This war of words may be over personalities or doctrines. Whenever individuals are in earnest about their beliefs, those viewpoints become the criteria by which faithfulness to God is judged. The greater their passion for a particular doctrine, the greater danger there is for conflict. In order to safe guard the fellowship of God, Paul calls attention to self-denial on the part of each individual. There must exist within every person a sense of unworthiness. Every Christian should aim, not for ambition, but rather for self-obliteration. One should do good deeds, not that men may glorify himself/herself, but that God may be glorified. Jesus expresses it this way:

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Again, what is Paul's antidote to division? Listen to Paul as he reflects upon the incarnation as the moving force for acceptance of other believers:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: [6] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with

God something to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**Philippians 2:1-11**).

God's remedy for unhappiness is Jesus. God's remedy for discord is Jesus. God's solution for inward peace—peace that passes all understanding—is Jesus. Before you can experience this joy that Paul speaks of, one must come to a consciousness that he/she stands in need of a righteousness that is outside of one's own actions. This righteousness is an alien righteousness. One must come to the cross to receive the righteousness that belongs to God. The joy that Paul speaks of in the Philippians letter is a joy that is beyond circumstances in life. Joy is an inner quality of life that delights in the Law of God. This joy is inward in the Holy Spirit. This joy springs up within every individual in a way that is totally unrelated to harsh conditions or state of affairs in everyday life. What is the kingdom of God about? Listen to Paul as he shouts, as it were: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, [18] because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (**Romans 14:17-18**).

Do you want to experience this "joy in the Holy Spirit"? If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, then you must live a pure life. When one lives in sin, this keeps one from the source of joy, which is God. In order for one to experience true joy, the believer must submit his/her life to Him. How does one experience peace in the Holy Spirit? Again, Paul gives the remedy:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 4:4-6**).

Where is peace and joy? It is in Christ Jesus. It is not in one's wealth or fame. It is not in one's birth? Do you want that peace that transcends all understanding? If so, then you must turn to Jesus. In the third chapter of Philippians, immediately following his call for joy, Paul reflects upon doctrine—the doctrine of justification by faith. In this doctrine that produces joy—the righteousness that comes by faith—one quickly discovers that the good news of God makes it all worthwhile, whatever your lot in life. Paul briefly gives an impressive family background before denouncing all as futile in comparison to knowing Christ:

[2] Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. [3] For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit

of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (**Philippians 3:2-6**).

This is an imposing catalog; yet, for Paul, he willingly renounces it all for the privilege of "knowing Christ." One should listen to Paul as he seeks to capture his most inward feelings about his gratitude for God's salvation:

[7] But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (**3:7-11**).

Is it any wonder that Paul echoes the resounding "rejoice in the Lord"? True rejoicing is a safe guard for one's sanity. Every Christian faces the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Jesus warns His disciples about impending stumbling blocks. Yet, in spite of troubles, Jesus says,

[32] But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. [33] I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (**John 16:32-33**).

Paul knew that in Jesus he had peace in spite of outward circumstances in life. By 55 CE, Paul had experienced hardships and physical abuse that would have caused many to thrown up their hands in disgust, but not Paul. Just a few years earlier than his Philippian letter written about 61 CE, Paul briefly gives a portrait of his birth and religious heritage followed by a description of suffering almost beyond description:

[16] I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. [17] In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. [18] Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. [19] You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! [20] In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. [21] To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. [22] Are they Hebrews? So am

I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. [23] Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? [30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. [32] In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. [33] But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands (**2 Corinthians 11:16-33**).

Rejoicing in the Lord is one of the greatest safeguards against dangers that confronts all Christians—even within one's own local fellowship of believers. Sometimes believers can be cruel and extremely hurtful—thinking they are being true to the faith, but in reality, they are just upholding long standing traditions of orthodoxy. In conclusion, may God help every believer to remember the words of the author of Hebrews:

[5] Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." [6] So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (**Hebrews 13:5-6**).

Where is true rejoicing? It is in Jesus, regardless of circumstances in life. Every Christian should always be conscious that there is not always a correlation between righteousness and material blessings. One only needs to reflect upon righteous Job and the calamities that befell him to realize that righteous acts and natural goods do not always follow. But, the one thing that is obvious in Job's life is this: Faith always presses on beyond the material rewards. It is also in this regard that Habakkuk can sing his magnificent song of faith:

[17] Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, [18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior (**Habakkuk 3:17-18**).

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Saints in Christ Jesus

Thrust statement: **In Jesus Christ, God makes sinners saints to serve Him.**

Scripture reading: **Philippians 1:1-7.**

INTRODUCTION

As one reflects upon this short epistle of Paul to the Philippians, one is immediately conscious of the joy that permeates this epistle. One of its great themes is "joy in the Lord." In this letter Paul calls attention to the fact that Christians are servants and saints (**Philippians 1:1**). In spite of trials and tribulations, Christians are to demonstrate through their faith how to triumph and conquer the enemy—Satan. Through one's faithfulness to God, one is able to attract and persuade other people to accept Christ. There is a sense in which Paul advances this concept of attraction as he explains how the Gospel is advanced through his chains:

> Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. [13] As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. [14] Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly (**Philippians 1:12-14**).[1]

PAUL'S THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (1:3-11)

Before Paul advances this perception of how God utilizes persecution to advance His Gospel, Paul sets forth his thanksgiving and prayer with concise theological statements about the very core of his thoughts about Christianity. He writes passionately to the Philippians:

[3] I thank my God every time I remember you. [4] In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, [6] being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. [8] God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. [9] And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, [10] so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (**1:3-11**).

From this pericope—Thanksgiving and Prayer—one discovers that Paul is conscious that God is at work in his life and in the lives of His people (**1:6**); he also stresses that they, too, share in God's grace (**1:7**); it is his desire that their love will abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight into how to be pure and blameless (**1:9-11**); and, finally, he wishes that each be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. (**1:11**). Paul could still rejoice in spite of his confinement in prison.

Could you rejoice in prison? Can you still rejoice about God working in you as you bury your father, your mother, your son, your daughter, your brother, and your sister? How do you feel about Christianity? When a congregation experiences problems within the local body of believers as the Philippians experienced, are you still conscious that God is working in you? Are you still aware that you share in God's grace? Is it still your desire to abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight in love to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit? Did the Philippian congregation exist without conflict? Listen to Paul as he pleads with two sisters that were at one another's throats:

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. [3] Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. [4] Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all (**4:2-4**).

SHARERS IN GOD'S GRACE (1:7)

How many can say, as Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**1:21**). This is the same individual who could say: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (**4:11**). As each person approaches this short epistle, one must ask the question: What is a Christian? How do you respond to this question? What is a saint? How do you respond to this question? Is your concept of a Christian, or saint, simply a skeleton or does it have flesh? Since this study is about saints in Christ Jesus, then one should seek a biblical answer to the question as to what a

Christian is. Just a cursory glance at **Philippians 1:7** reveals the innermost thoughts of Paul about what it means to be a saint in Christ Jesus.

To begin with, Paul says, as stated above: "all of you share in God's grace with me." In other words, a Christian, or saint, is one who is under God's grace and favor. But again the question is: What is grace? Grace by definition is simply unmerited or underserved favor. To the Romans, he writes: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). Again, Paul captures the very depth of God's grace and love in his epistle to the Ephesians:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—[9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**).

Is not grace the free, spontaneous, and absolute loving kindness of God toward man? Grace stands in contrast to the ideas of debt, law, or work. Paul expresses this forcefully to Titus:

> He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. [8] This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**Titus 3:5-8**).

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP: CREATED TO DO GOD'S WORK (1:6)

God has saved Dallas Burdette, God has saved Darlene Violette, God has saved Katrina Burdette, God has saved Liz Stewart, God has saved Curtiss Creel, God has saved Carrol Brooks, God has saved Earl Moore, and God has saved every person who has responded to Jesus as Lord. Salvation is only "in and through" Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). If one is in Christ, he/she is a saint. To be a saint means to be in Christ. A saint is one who has been set apart by God. It means that God sees us and is concerned about us in a very special manner. Saints are individuals of whom God has taken hold and has set apart for his own function and purpose. Paul says,

> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (**Philippians 2:12-13**).

Are you doing God's work? Are you allowing God to work in you? God's purpose in saving us through his grace is to do good works. Paul expresses it this way: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Ephesians 2:10**). God is working in Mickey Brooks, God is working in Tammy Salinas, God is working in Donnie Newton, God is

working in Lisa Morrow, and God is working in Lavone Burdette. Paul is saying, in essence, that C. J. Stewart is God's workmanship; God is saying that Debra Newton is God's workmanship; God is saying Frieda House is God's workmanship; God is saying that Missy Jones is God's workmanship.

Not only are Christians His workmanship, but also God is working in every believer. Yes, it is true that God is working in all of his saints. Are you conscious that God is working in you? Are you cognizant that you are a saint? Are you aware that you are special to God? You are enjoying the favor and grace of God through Jesus Christ. One should never forget the words of the Chronicler: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (**2 Chronicles 16:9**). In response to the question, Who is a Christian? The answer is: a Christian is one who is a partaker of God's grace. Once more Paul goes right to the heart of it all:

> What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? [33] Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (**Romans 8:31-33**).

One cannot read this insightful statement of Paul without standing in awe of such love and security. Yes, Paul is saying, "I am protected, I am guarded, and I am safe" in Jesus—the One through whom God the Father reconciles the world unto Himself.

SAINTS IN CHRIST JESUS (1:1)

This lesson began with emphasis upon the statement of Paul in **Philippians 1:7**: "all of you share in God's grace with me." But now, one should reread **Philippians 1:1**: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints (toi'" aJgivoi", tois &agiois) in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons." The word *saints* often causes individuals to stumble. This word *saint* is not reserved just for certain outstanding men and women in life. The word *saint* is applicable to every believer. It is significant that Paul does not begin with the "overseers and deacons," but he begins with "to all the saints in Christ Jesus." Again, one should remember that a saint is not some exceptional Christian. If so, this would probably exclude all of us here at New Covenant Fellowship—especially Dallas Burdette.

Just a perusal of the Book of **First Corinthians** reveals the carnal nature of the church. A casual reading of the Book reveals the divisions that existed within the local body of believers. Yet, in spite of this inherent weakness, Paul still addresses them as "saints," or "sanctified" (**1 Corinthians 1:2**). Just as God took hold of the Corinthians, so God has taken hold of every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl at New Covenant Fellowship who has put his/her trust in Jesus. James Hagan, Marvin Wilson,

Evelyn Wilson, Faith Wilson, and Bubba Wilson are sanctified in Christ Jesus. Have you been sanctified? If not, then you need to put your faith in Jesus.

Paul begins this epistle to the Philippians by reminding them that they are "saints in Christ Jesus." He was not content to just say, "all the saints at Philippi," but rather "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi." Are you aware that Paul uses the expression "in Christ" forty-eight times in his epistles? The Greek expression is ejn Cristw'/ (en cristw). Paul has no gospel apart from Christ. Christ is in me and I am in Christ. In the Corinthian letter, Paul expresses this truth by saying, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (**1 Corinthians 12:27**). Earlier, in this same epistle, Paul calls attention to the unique position of the Corinthians: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**6:19**).

Sanctification: Holiness As A Way of Life

The Corinthians, as stated above, were sanctified in Christ (hJgiasmevnoi" ejn Cristw'/, &hgiasmenois en cristw, "to make holy, consecrate, sanctify").[2] Their sanctification should result in holiness as a way of life: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy (aJgivoi", &agiois), together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (**1:2**). When one is "sanctified," one is set apart for God. Are you "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ"? Paul tells the Ephesians: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesians 4:4**). Are you "holy and blameless in his sight"?

Saint: Different From Other Things

The word *saint* is from the Greek word ἁγιö (&agios) and is equivalent to the Hebrew word vd\q{ (q)d#c), which is usually translated *holy*. The basic idea of this word is *different* from other things. To help one grasp the central idea of the word *saint*, perhaps some references to other Scriptures will set the stage for a more comprehensive view of this word. For example, Moses writes about the priests: "They must be holy (vd,qo) to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the LORD by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy (vd,qo)" (**Leviticus 21:6**). In other words, the priests were to be different from other men, for they were set apart by God for a special function. Another example is found in Leviticus concerning the tenth: "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy (vd,qo) to the LORD" (**27:30**).

The Temple was also holy because it was different from other places. God instructs Moses about the distinction between the holy place and the most holy place: "Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place (vd,qo) from the Most Holy Place (vd,qo)" (**Exodus 26:33**). Also, it is significant that the Jews were a holy nation: "you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (**19:6**). The Jews were different from all other nations. God,

through Abraham, separated them from the other nations. They had a special place in God's purpose. God, through the prophet Amos, says, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth" (**Amos 3:2**).

GOD CREATED A NEW ISRAEL

But the kingdom of Israel and Judah refused to play the part. Even when the Son came into the world, John informs his readers: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (**John 1:11**). God created a new Israel—the Christian community—to be the real people of God. Just as the Jews were created to be ἁγιö (&agios), holy, different, so now every Christian must be ἁγιö (&agios), that is to say, holy ones and different ones. Prior to Paul's conversion, he was busily engaged in persecuting the saints. After this encounter with the Lord Jesus, he was told to go to Damascus. Then an angel of the Lord informed another servant of the Lord to go and see Paul. Luke informs his readers that when God told Ananias to go see Paul, he objected: '"Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem" (**Acts 9:13**). Ananias was just one of many saints in Damascus. It is also in this vein that Luke informs Theophilus that Peter also goes to visit the saints at Lydda: "As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda" (**9:32**). Yes, Christians are different from other people. But what is the difference? They are set apart for the service of God. Are you conscious of this privilege and responsibility for kingdom work?

The clearest way to explain the distinction is to stress what one finds in the writings of Paul, for example, the phrases "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," and "in the Lord" occur frequently in the Pauline letters. "In Christ Jesus" occurs forty-eight times, "in Christ" occurs thirty-four times, and "in the Lord" occurs fifty times. This is the very essence of Christianity. William Barclay captures eloquently the force of the "in Christ" phrase, when he writes: "What makes the Christian different is that he is always and everywhere conscious of the encircling presence of Jesus Christ."[3]

As stated above, the Israelites were called ἁγιοι (&agioi), which means holy, separated, and consecrated. The Christian church has inherited the title and privileges of the Jewish nation. Listen to Peter as he speaks of the church as the "holy nation":

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (e[qno" a {gion, eqnos & agion), a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (**1 Peter 2:9-12**).

The term *holy nation* does not assert actual or personal sanctity. In other words, the phrase is a social term, not a personal epithet. The phrase is not applied merely to persons of exceptional holiness. Nor is this term only applied to those of exceptional acts of saintliness. For Paul, the word *saints* is applicable to those who believe:

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power [10] on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people (toi'" aJgivoi", tois & agiois) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you (**1 Thessalonians 1:8-10**).

CONCLUSION

In Christ, God makes sinners "saints." In and through Christ, God makes us saints in order to serve Him. In other words, in Christ, we have been "set apart" for His service. Are you one who believes? Do you wish to become a part of God's holy people? If not, then you will be punished with "everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." Again, the words of Peter are worth citing once more in order to focus on what the word saint demands: "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (**1 Peter 2:11**). In order for you to be a "saint," you must become a part of Christ's spiritual community. Do you stand out in the world? Do you show others how to triumph in the face of turmoil? Do you demonstrate to others how to conquer the things of Satan? Can you say, as Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"?

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2] hJgiasmevnoi" is from αΣγιαψζω ("to make holy, consecrate, sanctify): hJgiasmevnoi" is a perfect passive, participle, masculine, plural, dative,

[3] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 11.

Shining Like Stars in the Universe

Thrust Statement: **God wants His people to shine like stars in the universe.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 2:14-18**

> Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the Word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing (**Philippians 2:14-16**).[1]

Paul is continuing the development of his thoughts from **verses 12** and **13**. He wants the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (**verse 12**). It is God who initiated this whole movement of salvation so that the Philippians could be forgiven. It is God who inaugurated this salvation so that we may be saved and redeemed and made holy. God is concerned about Betty Gatewood; He is concerned about Rich Harrison; He is concerned about David and Brenda Neenan; He is concerned about Frank DiBattiste; He is concerned about Lavar Small; He is concerned about Toni Smith; He is concerned about Jerry Yarckou.

Yes, God desires every one of His redeemed to shine light stars in the universe. God wants His people to conduct themselves in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel. He wants one's behavior to shine forth as lights in a wicked world. Are you shining? What about your everyday walk with God? Can you say, "I live my life in such a way that I uphold the Gospel of Christ"? The Gospel of Christ has ethical implications. The Gospel is good news about God's way of salvation. But there is a sense in which one "obeys the Gospel" by the way he/she lives.

Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, warns of God's judgment against individuals whose lives do not exemplify the Gospel of God: "He will punish those

who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**). What does it mean to you to "obey the gospel"? Do you relate the phrase, "obeying the gospel," as submitting your life to the Lord Jesus? Is ethical behavior a part of what it means to "obey the gospel"? If you are not living a good and clean life, then you are not "obeying the gospel." Is your manner of life "worthy of the gospel of Christ"? To "obey the gospel" is much more than just being baptized, which is what is usually connected with this phrase. The context indicates that this obedience is linked with Christian living.

We should never forget that it is God working in us "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:14**). He is concerned about your soul and mine. God is holding on to each of us, and He will go on working in each of us until we have arrived at that state for which He destined us. We have "tasted the heavenly gift" (**Hebrews 6:4**); we have "shared in the Holy Spirit (**6:4**); we have "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age" (**6:5**). Even though the positives of our spiritual blessings are almost beyond our grasp, yet, we must still examine and question the negative aspects of our fleshly nature. Have we turned away from God? Have we bowed away from all this goodness of God? If so, our prayers should be that we will confess our sins and repent. Remember the words of John:

> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:1-2**).

Your negligence did not come overnight. Generally, one's digression back into sin is something that happens gradually. Perhaps it starts with missing your daily devotional or your quiet time with God; it may be that it begins when a Wednesday night Bible study is pushed aside; or, it may have started when Sunday morning gatherings are taken very lightly. Are you cold or hot for the Lord? Are you lukewarm in your commitment to the Lord? Do you flirt around with sin? How long has it been since you reflected upon the words of Paul to the Galatians? Listen to Paul as he encourages the believers to walk in the Spirit and not in the lust of the flesh:

> [16] So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. [17] For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. [19] The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature

with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16-25**).

Have you crucified your "sinful nature with its passions and desires"? Perhaps your downfall started when you ceased reading the Word of God day and night. Do you say, "I don't have time to read the Bible." Do you have time to watch television? Do you have time to read the newspaper? Do you have time for whatever you want to do? Do you meditate in the Word as the Psalmist speaks of in the first Psalm?

> Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. [2] But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (**Psalm 1:1-2**).

The Apostle Peter also encourages Christians scattered throughout "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" to

> Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. [2] Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, [3] now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (**1 Peter 2:1-3**).

If you are a Christian, then you "have tasted that the Lord is good." If you are a Christian, then you must be conscious that God has chosen you to a live pure and holy life. God expects obedience to His Word. Listen again as Peter draws attention to the sanctifying work of the Holy Sprit and its implications: "obedience to Jesus Christ" (**2:1**).

If you are not right with God, my prayer is that you will remember the words of the Holy Spirit: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (**Hebrews 3:7,8**). God's invitation is extended to everyone. Listen to the words of John in the book of Revelation:

> The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life (**Revelation 22:17**).

Have you forgotten that "You are the salt of the earth" (**Matthew 5:13**)? Have you forgotten that "You are the light of the world" (**5:14**)? Through Paul, the Holy Spirit is reminding the Philippians that they are to "shine like stars in the universe" (**Philippians 2:15**). How does this shining occur? Listen again as the Holy Spirit speaks about the believers' activity in His service: "as you hold out the word of life" (**2:16**). Are you holding out the word of life? Is your light under a bowl? Or is your light on a stand so that it may give light to everyone in the house (**Matthew 5:15**). God's people are to let their light shine so that people "may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (**5:16**).

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

Not only does Paul tell the Philippians what to do, but he also tells them what to avoid. He appeals for Christian conduct. Paul's immediate purpose here is to exhort them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Many can work out their salvation with fear and trembling as long as things are going well, but what happens to this fear and trembling if unpleasant things happen to us? How do we react toward God's grace? Have you lost a loved one? Have you lost a job? Have you lost a husband or wife through divorce? Have you lost your home? Have you lost your good health? If so, how do you react toward the one who sent His Son to die for you?

Paul's immediate purpose is to exhort the Philippians to work out their salvation without "complaining or arguing" (**2:14**). Even though they were undergoing many conflicts, nevertheless, he says,

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (**1:27-30**).

Paul puts all of this in terms of their status before God. Since they are "children of God," he lets them know that this is the central thing in his exhortation to them. He writes:

> Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, **in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life**—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (**2:14-18**).

The implication of these Scriptures is: because you are a Christian, then these are the things you must remember and put into practice. As children of God, God's people must not complain as a result of adverse circumstances in life. Not only are God's children not to complain or argue but they are also to maintain purity in their lives. One cannot divorce Christian ethics and morality from the only basis from which ethics and morality derive. One cannot separate God and ethics. One of the reasons that Paul assigns for not complaining and arguing is that God's people "may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe" (**2:15-16**).

Christians are different! Are you different? Christians are to be different because they are children of God. We read about one being born of the Spirit, one receiving the Spirit, one being regenerated, one being born again, or being created anew. Yes, every Christian receives something of the divine nature. It is in this vein that Peter says,

> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

Since we, as Christians, are redeemed, then Peter, as stated earlier, exhorts a change in our life style:

> Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (**2:1-3**).

We are to do what God asks us to do. "Do everything without complaining or arguing" (**Philippians 2:14**) takes us back to **verses 12-13**. Every believer should commit to memory the words of Paul in **verse 13**: "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." "Without complaining" is a striking statement. One cannot but reflect upon the history of Israel, especially their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Paul did not cite **Psalms 106**, which is a history of Israel, but this **verse** (**14**) is reminiscent of this history by the Psalmist. Paul is saying in effect that the Christian life, too, is a pilgrimage. Paul is saying in effect that you will find as the Children of Israel did that God sometimes puts His people in places that they do not like. In other words, there may be days in which you do not have water to quench your thirst; there may be days in which your food will not be very pleasing; there may be days in which your enemy confronts you. How are you to react to such circumstances? The Scripture says, "without complaining."

In your walk with God, I remind each of you that it is God working in you, both to will and to do. He is leading you and perfecting you in the process. There may be times in which you will say, "Why me, Lord?" When we complain we doubt. Complaining is indicative of a lack of faith. It leads to poor testimony; it brings disgrace upon the Christian name. To sum up this message today, I remind each of you of the trials that Jesus endured without complaint:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (**Hebrews 12:1-3**).

Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted (**Matthew 4:1-11**), but He did not grumble or complain. He responded to the various temptations by citing Scripture. You remember the accounts that record the Gethsemane episode. Even though God led Him to Gethsemane, he never complained (**26:36-56**). No wonder Paul reminded the Philippians: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 2:5**).

It is God who initiated this whole movement of salvation so that we may be forgiven, saved, and redeemed. God wants sanctification for us. First of all, He sent Jesus in order that there may be a people sanctified: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). The King James Version employs the word "sanctification" rather than the word "holiness." In Jesus one is holy because Jesus is holy. Jesus is our "righteousness, holiness and redemption." Even though one is holy in Jesus, there is still what may be called progressive sanctification. In other words, every believer is continuously doing what Paul expresses to the Philippians:

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (**Philippians 3:12-21**).

CONCLUSION

God is holding on to you, and He will go on working in you until you have arrived at that state for which He has destined you. I encourage each of you to "stand firm in the Lord" (**4:1**). As I conclude this message, I remind each of you of Paul's final words to the Corinthians in his first epistle: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**). Are you shining as stars in the universe?

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

The Secret of Happiness: Jesus Christ

Thrust Statement: **Paul's secret to happiness is Jesus Christ.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 1:21; 3:10; 4:11; 4:13; 4:19**

At the time of writing this epistle to the Philippians (61 CE), Paul was confined to prison in Rome (**Philippians 1:12-14**). In spite of incarceration, Paul's outward circumstances could not change his attitude toward Christ and His people. He experienced that peace that "transcends all understanding (**4:4-7**). He could still say, "I hope in the Lord Jesus (**2:19**) and "I am confident in the Lord" (**2:24**). Nothing could take away Paul's happiness. Prior to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, he wrote to the Christians in Rome about his determination to follow Christ in spite of persecution: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword" (**Romans 8:35**)?[1]

How did Paul respond to his own question? How do you respond to this same question? Listen to Paul as he answers very boldly:

> 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:37-39**).

Do you react in the same way that Paul describes his own behavior in this epistle to the Christians in Rome? Do you allow circumstances in life to depress you? How do you react if someone says something against you that you do not like, especially if it is not true? How do you conduct yourself in response to someone in your family dying? How

do you answer if you lose your job? Do you allow outward circumstances to interfere with your happiness in the Lord? How could Paul endure so much suffering, but yet still say, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (**Philippians 4:4**)? How long has it been since you reflected upon the trials that Paul endured for the cause of Christ? Listen to Paul as he enumerates some of his trials:

> Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. [23] Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? [2] (**2 Corinthians 11:22-39**)

What was Paul's secret? How could he rejoice in the face of so many unfortunate circumstances in life? The answer lies in one person: Jesus. Yes, Jesus was Paul's secret to happiness. Paul filled his mind with Christ. In fact, Paul, in the **first chapter of Philippians,** uses the words "Christ Jesus" five times (**1:1, 6, 8, 26**), "Jesus Christ" three times (**1:2, 11, 19**), and the title "Christ" nine times (**1:10, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 27, 29**). In other words, Paul utilizes some form of the names Jesus and Christ seventeen times in this first chapter. Even though Paul speaks of Joy throughout this epistle, nevertheless, the name of Jesus overshadows even the word *joy*. Paul belonged to Jesus, and he wanted to know Him. It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**).

Jesus was Paul's every thought. Is Jesus your every thought? Is Jesus first in your life? Or are the things of the world first in your life? As you ponder these questions within your own heart, are you now thinking of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount—"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (**Matthew 6:33**)? Again, the words of Jesus should ring loud and clear: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (**Matthew 6:24**). Paul addresses his inner feelings to the Philippians as he seeks to convey what it is that really and truly makes one happy. One should observe the conciseness with which Paul calls attention to his own rejection of his earlier material blessings:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

Paul, according to his own list of attainments (**2 Corinthians 11:22-23**), could have catalogued a list of privileges on the credit side of the balance; but when he met Christ, he wrote them off as nothing more than bad debts—"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (**Philippians 3:8**). For Paul, all human achievements had to be set-aside in order for him to accept God's grace that is freely given to everyone who believes in Jesus. Again, listen in on Paul as he leads up to his consciousness of the joy of knowing Jesus:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (**3:4-6**).

This list is impressive, but did it really make an impact on Paul? Paul says no! Again, pay attention to Paul as he reveals his innermost thoughts: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (**3:8**). How do you feel about knowing the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ? Have you learned this lesson yet? Are you participating in complaints against God's children? Are you constantly bickering in Christian gatherings? Are you seeking to drown your sorrows in alcohol? Are you trying to fill the void in your life with drugs? Are you filled with unhappiness? If so, what is the answer? The way out of the "valley of the shadow of death" is Jesus. Do you remember the words of Jesus as He speaks of His burden versus the burden of the world? Everyone should take note as to what the Master says,

[28]Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
[29] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

Once more, what is the secret of happiness? The answer is Jesus! This invitation is open to all who are exhausted and burdened down. When one comes to Christ by faith, He gives that individual rest. As one reflects upon the words of Jesus, one is immediately confronted with a plea—"come"—and a pledge—"I will give you rest." The rest that Jesus offers is not based on works, but on faith in Him. The Jewish

leaders cast heavy burdens upon the people with all their rules and regulations, but Jesus swept all those worries away. He, today, still sweeps all heaviness away if you are willing to put your trust in Him. This rest cannot be bought or earned; it is a gift. Do you want rest from your guilt and burden of sin? If so, then you must put your faith in Him and His finished work on Calvary.

Three words in **Matthew 11:28-30**, as stated above, stand out in Jesus' call for a response to His yoke. For instance, Jesus calls upon everyone to make a decision—"take"; He also calls for the development of one's life—"learn." If one will "take" and "learn," Jesus says that that person will discover peace, that is—rest for one's soul. Once you have made this commitment, then you must walk with Him. By taking His yoke, one can work alongside Him. This is a great privilege. Jesus is inviting you to walk side-by-side with Him in the unplowed fields and the unplanted fields; yes, He wants you to share in the harvest. Jesus wants people to learn to be like Him—"gentle and humble in heart." He wants everyone to know about Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. One's knowledge of Jesus should be demonstrated by an ever-growing grasp of the eternal Son. And, finally, one's service results from one's rest in Him. Knowing Jesus is the secret of happiness. The more one has of the mind of Christ, then the greater will be his or her happiness.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

As one reads the Philippian letter, one quickly discovers an opening into the mind of Christ. Paul, unlike the Gospels, reveals, as it were, the intimate mind of Christ concerning His coming to earth and why he came. The Gospels tell about His life and ministry; they tell about His death and resurrection, but they do not tell about the inner workings of the mind of Christ as forcefully as the Pauline passage to the Philippians. The Gospels reveal what Jesus said and did, but the Philippian epistle gives a record of Jesus' own thoughts concerning His atonement. One should take note as Paul soars into the heights of heaven in making known the hidden feelings of the Master:

> 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God
> something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature
> of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance
> as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on
> a cross! (**Philippians 2:6-8**)

One can only stand in awe of the humility and obedience of Jesus. Jesus laid aside the glory that belonged to Him in order to redeem sinful man. Jesus, in His prayer to the Father, speaks of this glory that He had with the Father before the creation of the world. Jesus prayed this prayer shortly before His death on the cross. Listen to Him as He prays:

> Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.
> 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal
> life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may
> know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I
> have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

[5] And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (**John 17:1-5**).

Jesus became a man and died for the salvation of all who would put their trust in Him. John describes it this way: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**). Once more, Jesus goes right to the heart of salvation in His conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:17-18**).

Paul expresses the coming of Christ this way: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). Jesus did not look on His own glory that He had with the Father before the world was, but rather He looked upon lost humanity. He not only humbled Himself, but He humbled Himself even to His death upon the cross. Matthew, too, gives just a little more insight into the mind of Christ, which is captured by Paul in **Philippians 2:6-8**. For this additional insight by Matthew, one should listen in on the conversation that Jesus had with the apostles and with the Father. In Gethsemane, He says to His disciples: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (**Matthew 26:38**). Then, in His prayer to the Father, He expresses his anxieties in a most telling way: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (**26:39**).

THE MIND OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

One should never stop shouting that the secret of one's happiness is Jesus. Every believer must strive to have the mind of Jesus. As you reflect upon the mind of Christ, you must consider the personality that Jesus exhibited in His life. The great characteristics of the life of Christ were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. Paul uses Christ as an example of how Christians should treat one another. Paul writes: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 2:5**). These three characteristics should be the hallmark of every believer. God does not want one's life to focus on self-centeredness, self-absorption, and self-expression; these works of the flesh annihilates one's likeness to Jesus and wipes out one's fellowship with other Christians. Jesus did not look on what rightfully belonged to Him, but rather he laid aside His power, His honor, His omniscience, and took the form of a man. It is in this vein that the author of Hebrews writes:

> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—[15] and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. [16] For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. [17] For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in

service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. [18] Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (**Hebrews 2:14-18**).

Do you have the mind of Christ? Are you like Christ? Paul writes to the Ephesians that "they should be made new in the attitudes of their minds" (**Ephesians 4:23**). Having said this, he continues to express what it is that every believer should strive toward: "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (**4:24**). The obedience of Christ was not the only motivating factor of His going to the cross, but His love also played a tremendous part. Again, Paul writes: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (**Galatians 2:20**). Paul never ceased calling attention to the mind of Christ: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (**Ephesians 5:1-2**).

CONCLUSION

How do you feel about each person who meets here at Oakwood Hills in DeFuniak Springs, Florida? Do you love one another? What is your message concerning brotherly love? Pay attention to John as he expresses his concern:

> [11] This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. [12] Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. [13] Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. [14] We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. [15] Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him (**1 John 3:11-15**).

How do you define love? Once more, one should reflect upon the words of Paul to the Philippians as he seeks to capture the proper attitude Christians should possess toward one another: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 2:5**). Do you have the attitude of Christ? Hear Paul as he develops a proper concept of what true love is all about:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**).

Do you love this way? Do you love one another deeply? Do you serve others in this congregation? Peter goes right to the very core of love and service in his epistle to the Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia by saying that they were to

> love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. [9] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. [10] Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (**1 Peter 4:8-10**).

Yes, the mind of the believer and the mind of Christ should be the same. Jesus won the hearts of the people through love, not power. He did not win them by blasting them with power, but rather He won them through demonstrating a love that they could not resist. How can you continue to resist His love? Are you willing to confess the name of Jesus as Lord? In conclusion, one should reread the words of Paul about the Lordship of Jesus:

> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**Philippians 2:9-11**).

What was Paul's secret to happiness? One knows that his secret was Jesus. Do you have Jesus? Do you have the mind of Christ? If you want the peace that transcends all understanding, then you must have the Prince of Peace.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[2]*The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

Working Out God's Amazing Salvation

Thrust Statement: **We are to work out this amazing salvation God has given us with awe.**

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 2:12-13**

Does Paul teach that one earns his/ her own salvation? Is salvation by works? Or is salvation by grace? Just what is Paul exhorting the Philippians to do? Does "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**) contradict what Paul says to Titus?

> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (**Titus 2:4-7**).

Paul speaks of working out one's salvation in **Philippians 2:12**, but in **Titus 2**, he is speaking, not of working out your own salvation, but rather, of God's initiative in our salvation. Salvation is something they already possess through God's mercy. Even though one is saved by grace, nevertheless, Paul does not discount "good works" as necessary for the believer? No! Good works are things God ordained before the foundation of the world. Paul goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Ephesians 2:10**). Prior to this call to the Ephesians for "good works," Paul clearly advances salvation by God's grace. Again, he goes right to the root of redemption:

> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:4-9**).

Let us return to Paul's letter to Titus. In this letter, Paul forcefully draws attention to good works following one's salvation by the grace of God:

> This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (**Titus 3:8**).

Also, Paul, in writing to the Philippians, cannot make a practical appeal to good works without first putting it in terms of doctrine. In other words, he sets forth the scheme of redemption, and, then, he calls for conduct that will glorify God. Prior to his encouraging the Philippians to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**), he says, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (**Philippians 1:27**). This reflection upon God's activity in our salvation is Paul's characteristic way of making an appeal for conduct and ethical behavior.

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 1:11-15**).

It is not uncommon for Paul to lay down "grace" first, and then say, "If you believe this, then, cannot you see that this redemption inevitably necessitates a change in one's life style. He does not confront us with a way of life, and then say, "Go and live it." But rather, Paul tells us about the things that have been done for us, and then says, "Now then—go and live it." As you make this transition from doctrine, that is to say, the good news about salvation in Jesus, there is always a "therefore" (**Philippians 2:12**). There is a logical sequence from doctrine to behavior. Every believer must take up his cross and follow Jesus daily (**Matthew 16:24**).

What does it mean to "work out your salvation" (**Philippians 2:12**)? Before one can work out his or her own salvation, then, that person must see his or her own sinfulness and be conscious of his or her need of divine help. The Philippians, too, realized that they were sinners saved by grace. They also were conscious that at one time they were under the wrath of God; they were aware that at one time they were

under the dominion of sin; they were mindful that at one time they were under the curse of the law; and they were cognizant that at one time they were under condemnation. They knew that at one time they were guilty in the sight of God. They had heard and believed the good news of the gospel—that God had sent His only begotten Son to die in order to make atonement for them. Now it is time to produce fruit worthy of repentance.

"Working out your salvation" simply means that one is to perfect, to bring to pass, and to lead a life that results in "good works"—works that please God. One must now perfect the salvation given to him or her through faith in Jesus. Just as John the Baptizer exhorted the religious leaders to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (**Matthew 3:8**), so must every believer work out his or her own salvation with awe and reverence. One must submit himself or herself entirely to God. What kind of works or fruit is involved in the works that Paul speaks of in the Philippian letter. To begin with, let us reflect upon the words of Jesus in the healing of a man born blind:

> As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, **we must do the work of him who sent me**. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world**" (**John 9:1-5**).

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, sets forth the necessity of good works. In calling attention to fruit production in their lives, he also informed his disciples that they too were the lights of the world. It appears that *works* and *light* go together. Jesus proclaims ethical behavior for his followers:

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men**. You are the light of the world**. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they **may see your good deeds** and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

Again, as John records, Jesus speaks of working for the food that endures for eternal life:

> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (**John 6:27-29**).

To believe on the One whom God sent is to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling. What Paul told the Philippians to do concerning kingdom behavior is also set forth in his letter to the Romans:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

How does one present his body a living sacrifice? Is it through rituals or through ethical behavior? Is it through producing good fruit in one's way of life? Immediately upon calling upon the Roman Christians to present their bodies a living sacrifice, Paul catalogues a number of characteristics that exemplify Christ in their lives:

> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:9-21**).

This is what it means to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. We have been given a new start; we have been given a new nature. Salvation is set before us. We need to read the Word of God; we need to pray; we need to share salvation; we need to proclaim redemption. Just as David, the psalmist, expresses his gratitude for God's kindness, so must every believer allow gratefulness on his or her lips. David exclaims:

> I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly (**Psalms 40:8-10**).

The believer loves the Word, lives the Word, and preaches the Word. Do you desire to do the will of God? Do you proclaim God's righteousness? Do you hide His righteousness in your heart? Do you conceal God's love and truth? Are you a silent Christian? Does your inner man rejoice in God's law? Every Christian makes known the wonders of God's love through His Son Jesus. It is in this same vein of David's delight with the law that Paul, too, cries out: "in my inner being I delight in God's law" (**Romans 7:22**). Where is your delight? Where is your happiness? Where is

your enjoyment? Is it in Christian ministry? Is it in the Word of God? Is your life in harmony with the law of God? Or is your life out of harmony with the law of God? Where are you? How do you stand? How do you measure up to God's standard? The first chapter in the book of Psalms sets forth the distinction between the godly and the ungodly. Which section of this Psalm do you fall into—godly or ungodly? This psalm is one that every Christian should memorize. Listen to the Holy Spirit:

> [1] Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. [2] But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. [4] Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. [5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. [6] For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish (**Psalms 1:1-6**).

Since God clothed us with His righteousness, are we devoting ourselves to God? Are we consecrating ourselves to prayer? Are we dedicating ourselves to ministry? Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with these words: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (**Colossians 4:2-4**). Again, I ask, are you praying for the advancement of God's kingdom? Are you also proclaiming the message of redemption? In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:9-10**).

Are we guilty of not working out this amazing salvation God has given us with fear and trembling? No, we do not work with "fear and trembling" in the sense of losing our salvation. But rather, this working is in the spirit of awe. In other words, the believer with humility and holy reverence works out his salvation; it is a holy vigilance and circumspection. The Christian constantly offers up a sacrifice of praise. Remember the words of the Hebrew writer:

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (**Hebrews 13:15-16**).

With every believer, it is, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (**Psalms 40:8**). Just as David could not seal his lips (**Psalms 40:10**) about God's righteousness, God's faithfulness, God's salvation, or God's love, so, too, every Christian shares the "good news" of God's righteousness made available through faith in His Son Jesus. Jesus is God's righteousness to us and for us. We cannot seal our lips about God's righteousness through faith in Jesus to all who believe. Paul sets forth this righteousness from God in rapturous language to the Romans:

> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:22-26).**

Jesus is God's faithfulness. It is in Jesus that one finds hope. It is in Jesus that one discovers security. We cannot seal our lips about God's faithfulness. Paul writes,

> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Romans 8:38-39**).

In Romans, chapter 5, Paul speaks of freedom from the "wrath" of God through Jesus our Lord. He goes right to the heart of salvation. It is not in man, but it is in Jesus. We cannot seal our lips about freedom from God's wrath in Jesus. We cannot seal our lips about God's reconciliation in Jesus. Jesus is God's salvation for lost humanity:

> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (**Romans 5:9-11**).

Thus, like David, when we think of Him, we do not seal our lips; nor do we cease to do his will. In closing this message, I remind you of the words of the Hebrew writer:

> May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever (**Hebrews 13:20-21**).

Date of Revelation

Thrust Statement: **John wrote the Book of Revelation during the lifetime of Nero Caesar.**

Scripture Reading: **Revelation 1:1-3; 13:11-18; 17:1-14**

In the reading of the Book of Revelation, there are certain questions that arise in the minds of every reader. When was the book written? When John writes, "what must soon take place," what does he mean (**Revelation 1:1**)? When the Scripture speaks of "the time is near," what does that phrase mean (**1:3**)? Who is the man who bore the number 666 as recorded in **Revelation 13**? Who is the king that followed the five kings mentioned in **Revelation 17**? Is the Book of Revelation continuous history down through the ages or is it dealing with a specific period of time during the early history of the church? Are there proper divisions in the book? An answer to the above questions should assist one in assigning a date to Revelation. This essay will analyze three distinct categories—the time is near, the number of the beast, and the sixth king—in order to try to arrive at an approximate date of the Book of Revelation.

As one seeks to ascertain the date of the Book of Revelation, one must endeavor to take oneself away from the present and transport oneself back to the historical situation of the author of this book. One must seek to understand the position of the author; one must look through his eyes; and one must note his surroundings. For one to decode this book correctly, one must give special concentration to the internal evidence to settle on the time of writing. The generally accepted date among many scholars is AD 96, but the internal evidence indicates a date of AD 68 as the latest date for the writing of this book. The Book of Revelation, according to the internal facts, was written prior to AD 70, which is the date assigned to the destruction of Jerusalem under the leadership of Titus who later became emperor (AD 79-81) of the Roman Empire.

Since there is historical distance from the text—2000 years—one must seek answers within the book itself for a solution in determining the date of writing.

Christians today have unknowingly canonized the traditions of men in their studies of this book, which book was written originally to give comfort and hope to believers who suffered persecution from the Jews and from Rome, especially harassment under the Emperor Nero (AD 54-68). There is still a great deal of cultural and personal bias as many Christians seek to unravel the Book of Revelation. As one studies this book, one is conscious that interpretation is not an easy science.

Frequently, tradition is the foundation for many Christians as they seek to unearth the meaning of this mysterious book with its symbols and imagery. Preunderstanding—information one already possesses—plays a role in the interpretation of any writing. The objective in this study is to unpack, as much as possible, the internal evidence in order to arrive at a correct analysis of the approximate date of John's letter, which is described as "The revelation (ἀποκάλυψις, apokaluyis) of Jesus Christ" (**Revelation 1:1**).[1] This study will briefly analyze certain Scriptures with the intention of establishing from the internal evidence the time frame for this writing so that one might avoid fanciful and unfounded beliefs built around this book. So as to avoid reading into the Scriptures one's presuppositions, this essay seeks to pull apart, as it were, the biblical evidence so that one might discover an accurate date for the Book of Revelation in order to avoid outlandish fertile imaginations among so many Christians. To begin with, this essay analyzes the phrase, "the time is near," in order to call attention to the urgency of the call to be faithful in spite of persecution. This particular phrase is crucial to a proper understanding of the book.

THE TIME IS NEAR

John alerts his readers about the impending destruction of Jerusalem, which devastation Jesus warned His disciples about before His death. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus' prophecy concerning the complete overthrow of the old Jewish system, which prophecy includes the obliteration of apostate Jerusalem with its Temple. Now, about thirty-five years later, Jesus reveals to John that the prophecy is about to be fulfilled. John, as he receives this announcement about the fulfillment of Jesus' earlier prophecy, begins his book with Jesus' revelation about the nearness of the catastrophe upon this once holy city. Within the first three verses, John uses two expressions that draw attention to the nearness of the approaching judgment of God—"soon take place" and "the time is near."

> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place (ἐν τάχει, en tacei). He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, Jo gar kairos eggus) [**Revelation 1:1-3**].

One should always interpret any text within its full unit of meaning. The **first three verses** in the prologue sets forth the idea that the things enumerated in this book would "soon take place." John is simply saying that the things he is writing about will occur "with speed" (ἐν τάχει, en tacei, "immediately," "without delay"[2] [**1:1**]). "What must soon take place" has reference to the approaching overthrow of Jerusalem as

predicted by Jesus in His discourse on the Mount of Olives (see **Matthew 24**). In the Mount of Olives discourse, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, this generation (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, &h genea Jauth) will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (**Matthew 24:34**). Twice, within the first three verses, John calls attention to the swiftness of the approaching events (**Revelation 1:1, 3**). One should give special attention to the phrase "this generation." This expression does not refer to 2000 years later, but rather to those living at that time. In other words, the events foretold by Jesus would happen within the lifetime of those present, even though some, no doubt, would die before the destruction of Jerusalem. An example of this concept is found in Jesus' statement to His disciples:

> For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. [28] I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (**Matthew 16:27-28**).

The second reference in the prologue to the Book of Revelation concerning the coming wrath of God upon Israel reads: "for the time is near" (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, &o gar kairos eggus). The KJV reads: "for the time is at hand" (**1:3**). In this verse, John encourages the recipients to read, to hear, and to take to heart the things written in this book. Why? John informs the Christians, "The time is near." This Apocalypse was written for a practical purpose, that is, to call attention to the time (ὁ καιρός, Jo kairos) of the events foretold by Jesus. Once more, John says the "time is near" for this judgment of God to come upon the nation of Israel. Listen to Jesus as He too addresses the religious leaders of Israel—forty years earlier—for their hypocrisy and forewarns them of the impending destruction of Jerusalem:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. [30] And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' [31] So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. [32] Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! [33] "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? [34] Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. [35] And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. [36] I tell you the truth, all this will come upon **this generation**. [37] "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. [38] Look, **your house is left to you desolate**. [39] For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (**Matthew 23:29-39**).

Jesus pointedly calls attention to the fact that all these atrocities will descend upon "this generation." In His description of the just-round-the-corner judgment upon Israel, He describes this sentence of God upon Israel with words that pierced the very heart and soul of the religious leaders: "Your house is left to you desolate." John the Baptist, too, began his ministry by calling attention to the looming verdict upon Israel:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. [10] The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**Matthew 3:7-12**).

John the Baptist is announcing to the Pharisees and Sadducees that the "coming wrath" (ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς, ths melloushs arghs, "about to come wrath") is just around the corner. The "ax is already at the root of the trees" and that "His winnowing fork is in his hand." The Book of Revelation sets forth in greater detail what was enunciated by John the Baptist in **Matthew 3** and by Jesus in **Matthew 24**. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus informs the seven churches of Asia that that " time is near." Not only does John begin the book with reference to the immediacy of the impending events, he also concludes the book (epilogue) with the final warning of Jesus: "Behold, I am coming soon! (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, idou ercomai tacu) Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book" (**Revelation 22:7**). Again, John informs his readers about Jesus' admonition to him:

> Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near (ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν, &o kairos gar eggus estin). [11] Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." [12] "Behold, I am coming soon! (ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ, idou ercomai tacu) My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. [13] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. [14] "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city (**22:10-14**).

Earlier, John had said, "Look, he is coming (᾽Ιδοὺ ἔρχεται, Idou ercetai) with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen" (**1:7**). The clause, "Look, he is coming" (᾽Ιδοὺ ἔρχεται Idou ercetai) [**1:7**] corresponds with the clause, "Behold I am coming soon" (**22:12**). "Look, he is coming" is the keynote of the Book of Revelation. This clause is the thesis of the whole book. For one to grasp the tenor of

the book, one must observe that His coming shortly is the text of the Book of Revelation. When Christians take the phrase, "Behold, he is coming," to refer to the so-called millennium or to hundreds of centuries later, one misses the full the import of the phrase as it is employed in this book. Once more, listen to the final words of Jesus as recorded in Revelation by John with his comments preceding the words of Jesus: "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon" [ἔρχομαι ταχύ, ercomai tacu] (**Revelation 22:20**).

One cannot help but wonder how the seven churches of Asia understood "I am coming soon." Another Scripture that is helpful in understanding the time frame of Revelation is **1:19**: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." The KJV renders this verse: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." The translations—"take place later" and "shall be hereafter"—are translated from the Greek: ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι, &a melllei genesqai, "the things which are about to occur." The above translations do not adequately express the sense of the original. It should read: "the things which are about to occur (μέλλει γενέσθαι, mellei genesqai)." This Greek phrase is indicative of the near approach of the violent persecutions that Christians were about to face throughout the Roman Empire.

Again, this same warning appears in the letter to the church in Philadelphia: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come (μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι, melloushs ercesqai, "being about to come") upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (**3:10**). Immediately, following these words of comfort, Jesus says, "I am coming soon (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, ταχυΨ ercomai tacu). Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (**3:11**). This warning is repeated over and over throughout the Book of Revelation. Its meaning—"I am coming soon"—is obvious to the unbiased reader.

Toward the end of the book, John says that an angel said: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near" [ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν, &o kairos gar eggus estin] (**22:10**). Just a few words before this pronouncement, an angel said: "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, Ja dei genesqai en tacei)." This Scripture repeats the declaration in **1:1** and proves conclusively that it refers to the events that were to almost immediately take place—war against Jerusalem and its destruction. The threefold declaration in **chapter 22** shows that that event—overthrow of Jerusalem—was almost ready to take place. For ease of reference, see the following chart:

Revelation 22:7	Revelation 22:12	Revelation 22:20
"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."	"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."	"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'"

The internal evidence sets forth the idea that the predicted events of judgments are about to come soon upon the nation of apostate Israel. The above Scriptures give its own testimony as to the time frame of the events foretold. The internal evidence seems to be overwhelming on the side of the early date—on or before AD 68. The coming refers to Parousia, that is to say, the judgment upon Israel in which its house will be left desolate. Jesus' Olivet Discourse, as revealed by Matthew, presents the same thought:

> At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory (**Matthew 24:30**).
> I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (**24:34**).
> For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. [28] I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (**Matthew 16:27-28**).

The coming of the "Son of Man" had reference to the coming of the "Son of Man" in judgment against His enemy—apostate Jerusalem, not the end of the world. The next evidence called forth deals with the number 666. If one can identify the man behind this number, this should go a long way in helping one to decipher the date of this book. For many Christians, the number 666 sends chills up-and-down their spines. Just recently, I was told about a sister in Christ who observed her grandchild dial on the telephone the number 666. Whereupon the grandmother said the child had a demon and was on her way to hell. This kind of fanciful imagination is what this essay seeks to set straight. This kind of wild imagination can wreak havoc upon the Christian community. This incorrect teaching can lead to bizarre and destructive behavior.

THE NUMBER AND NAME OF THE BEAST
Number 666

This author, Dallas Burdette, has listened to many fanciful interpretations placed upon this number 666. If one wishes to arrive at a correct understanding of this number and the name of the person to whom the number is assigned, one must allow the internal evidence of the book to set forth the unfolding of this mystery. Pay attention to John as he discloses God's revelation concerning the man and his number:

> He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, [17] so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. [18] This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666 (**Revelation 13:16-18**).

The identification of this man should assist one in assigning an approximate date for the writing of this book. It seems, at least to me, that Nero Caesar's name is the primary identification of the number 666.For example, in the Hebrew alphabet, the

name Nero Caesar is spelled נֶרוֹן קֵסַר n@ron q@s^r. The following is the numerical value of his name in Hebrew:

נ= 50	ר=200	ו = 6	נ=50	ק=100	ס=60	ר=200	
n	r	w	n	q	s	r	666

Frederick C. Grant captures the force of the code in his remarks concerning the identity of the number 666:

> In this passage (13:11-18) the "beast" is no longer the empire; it is "a man," whose number is 666; and the "second beast" is the imperial priesthood which enforces his worship. Who is this man, this beast-man that other men are compelled to worship under penalty of death? Many interpretations have been offered, but the most probable is to translate the name into Hebrew, the language of the original author, and sum up the letters after the ancient fashion.

נ	**n**	**= 50**		
ר	**r**	**= 200**	**ק**	**= 100**
ו	**w**	**= 6**	**ס**	**= 60**
נ	**n**	**= 50**	**ר**	**= 200**
		306 plus		**360 = 666**

> NRWN-QSR (Neron Qasar) is the Hebrew for the Emperor Nero—"Nero Caesar" The cryptogram is solved. It would have been dangerous to refer in so many words to the worship of the Emperor. Hence this cryptic, oracular style of writing, which was common in all the apocalyptic literature of Judaism and early Christianity (see Daniel 9:27 and Mark 13:14).[3]

Bob Emery, too, writes in this same vein:

> As you know, in the ancient languages, letters of the alphabet carry dual meanings. First, they can spell words and names. Second, they can be used to represent numbers. . . .By using the numerical value for each letter in Nero's name, it was easy for the Christians throughout the Empire to see that he was the beast.[4]

The following chart of the Hebrew and Greek alphabet used in the first century should assist one in comprehending more quickly the use of the alphabet for numerals in the first century:

TABLE OF NUMERALS IN USE **DURING THE BIBLICAL PERIOD**		
	Hebrew	*Greek*
1	א	α

2	ב	β
3	ג	γ
4	ד	δ
5	ה	ε
6	ו	ς
7	ז	ζ
8	ח	η
9	ט	θ
10	י	ι
20	כ	κ
30	ל	λ
40	מ	μ
50	נ	ν
60	ס	ξ
70	ע	ο
80	פ	π
90	צ	
100	ק	ρ
200	ר	σ
300	שׂ	τ
400	שׁ	υ
500	ק ת	φ
600		χ
700		ψ
800		ω[5]

Just a casual glance of the Book of Revelation reveals a number of Hebraicized names, which information tends to give validity to the Hebraic riddle concerning the name of Nero with its Hebrew spelling. To illustrate this principle, consider the following words that are transliterated from Hebrew into Greek letters: (1) "Abaddon" [᾽Αβαδδών, Abaddwn, Hebrew: אֲבַדּוֹן, a&b^ddon, **Revelation 9:11**], (2) "Armageddon" [᾽Αρμαγεδών, Jarmagedwn, Hebrew: הַר מְגִדּוֹ, h^r m+g!ddo, **16:16**], (3) Satan [σατάν, satan, Hebrew: שָׂטָן, c*f*n, **12:9**], (3) "Amen" [ἀμήν, amhn, Hebrew: אָמֵן, a*m@n **3:14**], and "hallelujah" [ἀλληλουιά, Jallhlouia, הַלְלוּיָהּ, h*l=lWy*h **19:1, 3, 4, 6**]. For John to use a cryptogram (a secret code, that is, a figure or representation having a hidden significance) for the name of Nero Caesar would not be out of character based upon the use of other Hebrew names, which names are transliterated into Greek characters, as listed above. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. writes about the secret letters, or symbolic figures:

> It is a basic truth that the book of Revelation was written in code, on the same principle that the army communicates messages in code intended only for the military personnel, but to be withheld from the public. For the same purpose the contents of Revelation were composed in code for the vital information and concealed instruction to the churches facing the impending persecutions; but to be withheld from the pagan Roman world. There were in all of the churches the spiritually endowed teachers, who possessed the

> "spiritual gifts" of the inspiration era, as recorded in chapters twelve and thirteen of First Corinthians.[6]

Since John employs several Hebrew names in his book, one cannot discover any reason as to why he would not employ Hebrew ciphers in the identification of the number of the man, namely, Nero, the one in whom the empire was personified. F. W. Farrar's comments are also helpful:

> That Nero was intended would be as clear to a Jew as that Babylon meant Rome, though Rome is never mentioned. He would not try the name Nero Caesar in Latin, because *isopsephia* (which the Jew called *Gematria*[7]) was almost unknown among the Romans, and their alphabetic numeration was wholly defective. He might try Νέρων Καῖσαρ in Greek, but it would not give him the right number. Then, as with a flash of intuition, it would occur to him to try the name in Hebrew. The Apostle was writing as a Hebrew, was evidently thinking as a Hebrew. His soloecistic Greek was sufficient to prove that the language was unfamiliar to him, and that all persons of whom he thought would primarily present themselves to his mind by their Hebrew designations. This, too, would render the cryptograph additionally secure against the prying inquisition of treacherous Pagan informers. It would have been to the last degree perilous to make the secret too clear. Accordingly, the Jewish Christian would have tried the name as he thought of the name—that is in Hebrew letters. And the moment hat he did this the secret stood revealed. No Jew ever thought of Nero except as "*Neron Kesar*," and this gives at once—נרון קסר = 666 = 200 + 60 + 100 + 50 + 6 + 200 + 50.[8]

Bart D. Ehrman's comments about the number 666 are insightful and worthy of citation:

> Intriguingly, when the name "Caesar Nero" is spelled in Hebrew letters ("Nero" becomes "Neron"), their numerical total is 666. More intriguingly still, the name can be spelled in another way, without a final n at the end. The n is worth 50 in Hebrew numerical system. When the alternative spelling is employed, the name adds up to 616. The author of Revelation is not referring to Hitler or Mussolini or anyone else in modern times. His enemy was Rome and its Caesars. It was Rome that had dominated the other nations of earth, exploited their native populations, and oppressed the people of God; it was the Roman emperor who was worshipped as divine and who persecuted Christians and sometimes put them to death. This book is about how God was going to overthrow this emperor and his empire at the end of time (see especially chaps. 18-19) prior to rewarding his saints with the kingdom in a new heavens and a new earth (chaps. 20-22).[9]

THE SIXTH KING IN REVELATION 17

As stated in the beginning of this study, if one wishes to identify correctly the date of the Book of Revelation, one must seek his or her answer from the internal evidence found within the book itself. Earlier, this essay focused on the expression "the time is near" in order to demonstrate that the people in the first century would

have understood this phrase to mean within their own lifetime. The second part of the internal evidence focused on **Revelation 13** concerning the number 666, which number is the number of a man--Nero. The third internal evidence surrounds the kings mentioned in **Revelation 17:9-11**. It is the position of this author (Dallas Burdette) that the sixth king is none other than Nero ("one is"—**17:10**). Listen to John as he identifies the beast that has seven heads and ten horns:

> 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. (**Revelation 17:9-11**)

As one peruses, or reads carefully, the entirety of **Revelation 17**, one can only conclude that the seven hills are representative of the Roman Empire, which also is represented by "seven heads." In **verse 3 of Revelation 17**, John writes: "3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns." The "seven heads" are identified as "seven hills" as well as "seven kings." Alternatively, the "ten horns" represent the ten provinces of the Roman Empire. Renan identifies the seven kings as: "Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero and Galba,"[10] and Farrar lists the ten horns as the ten provinces of the Roman Empire: "Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Germany."[11]

John writes that the beast had seven heads, which heads represent seven mountains as well as seven kings. Rome was associated with seven mountains. Those to whom the Book of Revelation was written would have understood this to be Rome. In order to give more credence to this view, citations from individuals who lived during this time frame should clarify beyond doubt that the seven heads refer to Rome. For example, Virgil (70-19 BC, Roman poet) speaks of Rome and the seven hills: "Lo, under his auspices, my son, shall that glorious Rome extend her empire to earth's ends, her ambitions to the skies, and shall embrace seven hills with a single city's wall, blessed in a brood of heroes."[12] Ovid (43 BC—AD 17) also speaks of the seven hills of Rome: "My home is not Dulichium or Ithaca or Same, places from which absence is no great punishment, but Rome, that gazes about her from her seven hills upon the whole world."[13] Marshal, who was born in AD 80, too, speaks of the seven hills of Rome: "Rising gently to the clear stars are the dainty rooftops of a lofty villa. On one side you may see the seven imperial mounts and appraise all Rome."[14] Kenneth L. Gentry lists the names of the seven hills as: "Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiine, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline hills."[15]

In counting the kings in **Revelation 17:10**, the logical starting point is with Julius Caesar. John speaks of "Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come" (**17:10**). These six kings are:

1. Julius Caesar (49—44 BC)

2. Augustus Caesar (31 BC—AD 14)

3. Tiberius Caesar (AD 14—37)

4. Gains [Caligula] Caesar (AD 37—41)

5. Claudius Caesar (AD 41-54)

6. Nero Caesar (AD 54—68)

Since the emperors following Julius Caesar continued the Caesarean line, one would naturally include Julius Caesar, so it seems, as the first of the kings in Revelation 17:10. Bart D. Ehrman, in spite of his assigning the date of Revelation to about AD 95, still makes some relevant remarks about the six kings in his informative work (My disagreement with Ehrman on this point does not detract from my high regard for his book.). The following is a lengthy quotation from Ehrman, but the citation is extremely enlightening:

The Beast of Babylon in chapter 17, which, as we will see, appears to represent the city of Rome, is said to have seven horns on its head. These represent seven "kings," evidently meaning the rulers of Rome (17:9). Five of these are said to have come and gone and one is currently reigning (17:10). This would presumably mean that the vision was written during the reign of the sixth Roman ruler, but with which ruler should we begin counting—with the dictator Julius Caesar or with his adopted son, the first emperor, Caesar Augustus? And does this vision date the entire book or simply this portion of it?

> On the basis of a detailed study of all such clues in the text, most investigators think that parts of the book were written during the 60s of the Common Era, soon after the persecution of the Christians under Nero. If we begin counting with Julius Caesar, Nero happens to have been the sixth ruler of Rome. He was also one of the author's chief enemies.[16]

The sixth ruler (Nero) reigned from October 13, AD 54 to June 9, AD 68.[17] The next ruler to appear was Galba (June AD 68 to January 15 AD 69), who reigned only for seven months. The seven-month reign coincides with John's statement: "They are also seven kings. Five have fallen (ἔπεσαν, epesan), one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little (ὀλίγον, oligon) while" (**Revelation 17:10**). The word "little" (oligon) fits the seventh king in this chronological order. Josephus, in his Jewish Wars, comments about Nero's reign of thirteen years: "Vespasian had returned to Caesarea and was preparing to march in full strength upon Jerusalem itself, when the news reached him that Nero was slain, after a reign of thirteen years (eight months) and eight days."[18] Josephus did not record all the events since many of the happenings were common knowledge, as demonstrated below from his own writings. Having said this, Josephus, following his reason for leaving out some details, still gives some information about the kings following Nero:

> All these matters I may be excused from narrating in detail, because they are commonly known and have been described by numerous Greek and Roman historians; but to preserve the connexions of events and to avoid any break in the narrative, I have summarily touched upon each.

> Vespasian, therefore, when the news first came deferred his expedition against Jerusalem, anxiously waiting to see upon whom the empire would devolve after Nero's death; nor when he subsequently heard that Galba was emperor would he undertake anything, until he had received further instructions from him concerning the war. But he sent his son Titus to the new emperor to salute him and to receive his orders with reference to the Jews; king Agrippa also embarked with Titus on the same errand to Galba. However, before they reached their destination and while they were sailing round through Achaea (for it was the winter season) in vessels of war, Galba was assassinated after a reign of seven months and as many days, and was succeeded as emperor by Otho, the rival claimant to the sovereignty.[19]

Whether one employs the term Dictator, Emperor, Caesar, or King as titles, one still speaks of the same individual. Some object to the title Emperor as being applicable to Julius Caesar, especially since Augustus is generally referred to as the first emperor—not the second. Kenneth Gentry comments on this particular point: "But even more persuasively, Julius was commonly recognized as the first ruler of the empire, since he 'first claimed the rights of Roman Emperor.' Though he was not emperor *de jure*, he was *de facto*."[20] Even Leonard L. Thompson, late date—AD 95/96, lists Julius Caesar as the first of the Roman emperors in his chronology of the emperors.[21] In chapter 1, "Historical Setting and Genre," Thompson draws attention to the "five have fallen" (**Revelation 17:10**), along with an excellent explanation of how to determine the five who had fallen. Listen to his insightful comments:

> More evidence for dating Revelation seems to be given in the reference to the seven heads of the beast as seven kings (emperors) (17:9-14). Of those seven kings, "five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come and when he comes he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition." One needs simply to figure out which five emperors have already fallen, and then the sixth emperor is reigning during the time that John writes. The earliest possible of the five past rulers would be Julius Caesar who died in 44 BCE. The complete list following Julius Caesar would then be the five emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the three emperors during the confusion after Nero's death, the three Flavian emperors, and then, if relevant, Nerva and Trajan. Their reigns occurred as follows:
>
> Julius (d. 44 BCE)
>
> Julio—Claudian dynasty (27 BCE—68 CE)
>
> Augustus (27 BCE—14 CE)
>
> Tiberius (14—37)
>
> Gaius (Caligula) (37—41)
>
> Claudius (41—54)
>
> Nero (54—68)
>
> Three short-lived emperors
>
> Galba (68—69)
>
> Otho (69)
>
> Vitellius (69)
>
> The Flavians (69—96)
>
> Vespasian (69—79)

Titus (79—81)
Domitian (81-96)
Nerva (96—98)
Trajan (98-117)[22]

Josephus (AD 37—101) referred to Augustus as the second emperor and Tiberius as the third emperor, which indicates that he considered Julius as the first emperor. The following citation sets forth the common recognition of Julius as the first emperor:

> Ambivulus' successor was Annius Rufus, whose administration was marked by the death of Caesar, the second emperor of the Romans,[23] who had ruled for fifty-seven years, six months, and two days. Antony had shared authority with him for fourteen years of this period. He was seventy-seven years old when he died. Caesar's successor in authority was the third emperor, Tiberius Nero, the son of his wife Julia.[24]

Not only did Josephus consider Augustus and Tiberius as second and third in the list of emperors, he also speaks of Gaius (Caligula) as the fourth emperor of the Roman Empire. He writes down: "After appointing Gaius as his successor to the empire, Tiberius lived on for a few days. He then died, having held the imperial rule for twenty-two years, five months, and three days. Gaius was the fourth emperor."[25] As one seeks to unravel the five kings of **Revelation 17:10**, one observes a similar phraseology by Tacitus (AD 56-117). In his comments about the seventh emperor of Rome (Galba), he does not list Julius as the first emperor, which illustrates the latitude of the writer as he seeks to record history. His comments about Galba's rule and the preceding emperors reminds one of John's choice of words:

> Galba's head, which had been fixed on a pole and maltreated by camp-followers and servants, was finally found the next day before the tomb of Petrobius—he was one of Nero's freedmen whom Galba had punished—and was placed with the body which had already been burned. This was the end of Servius Galba. He had lived seventy-three years, through the reigns of five emperors, with good fortune, and he was happier under the rule of others than in his own.[26]

A. M Renwick (Late Professor of Church History, Free Church of Scotland College) gives a clue as to the differences in naming the emperors: "In one sense Julius Caesar was the founder of the empire, and Augustus the founder of the principate."[27] It is this same vein that Suetonius (AD 70—160) wrote a biography of *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, which biographical sketches began with Julius Caesar and ended with Domitian (the twelfth emperor of the Roman Empire). Whether one employs the various designations—Dictator, Emperor, or King—one must still begin with Julius Caesar as the beginning of the Julio—Claudian dynasty (27 BCE—68 CE).

Did the world leaders in the first century refer to the Caesars as kings? Six hundred years before the Caesars came on the scene, the prophet Daniel, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called the leaders of Rome by the term "kings." Daniel (605 BC) prophesied concerning four world empires, one of which was the Roman

Empire. During the fourth of these kingdoms, Daniel speaks of the establishment of God's spiritual kingdom under the leadership of His Son. Daniel's description of the leaders (Caesars) is quite revealing: "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (**Daniel 2:44**). Jesus was born during the reign of the second emperor, or king, of the Roman Empire, namely Augustus. During Jesus' trial, Pilate and the religious leaders entered into a heated controversy over Jesus. They lashed out against Pilate with these words: " But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar' (οὐκ ἔχομεν βασιλέα εἰ μὴ Καίσαρα, ouk ecomen basilea ei mh kaisara) the chief priests answered" (**John 19:15**).

One discovers similar language and concepts about Caesar as king from the Jews who sought to stop Paul and Silas from preaching the resurrection of Jesus in Thessalonica: "They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus" (**Acts 17:7**). John, as demonstrated above, identifies the emperors of Rome as "kings" in **Revelation 17:10**: "[10] They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while." The name Caesar in Greek is Καῖσαρ (Kaisar) and the term *king* in Greek is βασιλεύς (basileuvs), which term was "used by courtesy of Herod the Tetrarch, Mt 14.9; of the Roman Emperor, as freq. in κοινή (koinh)."[28] The *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* is also helpful in understanding the name Caesar:

> Gradually this family name developed into a title. In the eastern part of the Roman Empire "Caesar" referred to the supreme ruler (cf. "Kaisar," "Czar"; cf. also Gk. Basilevus "king"); in the West the emperor was called Augustus and his sons were each named Caesar, until the second century A.D., when "Caesar" became the title of the specific son designated to succeed to Rome's highest office.[29]

CONCLUSION

If one is to interpret this book correctly, one must consider the internal evidence in order to arrive at a correct date for the composition of this apocalyptic book. This essay examined three phases of the internal evidence in order to assign a date that is in harmony with the context: (1) "the things that must soon take place, (2) the identity of the beast and his number [666]), and (3) the sixth king enumerated in John 17:10.

First, John, as examined above, began this book with "what must soon take place" (**Revelation 1:1**) and closes with "the things that must soon take place" (**22:6**). Again one observes the nearness of the events with "the time is near" (**1:3**) and "the time is near" (**22:10**). These four Scriptures call attention to the nearness of the events, not events 2000 years in the future. In **1:1** John employs the Greek words ἐν τάχει (en tavcei, "with speed") and the same phrase occurs in **22:6**, which is translated "shortly" in the King James Version. Even in **1:3** John writes once more with attention to the nearness of the events about to transpire. Listen to him as he puts pen to paper—ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (Jo gar kairoVs egguvs, "for the time is near"), and one also observes this

same phrase in the end of the book in **22:10**: ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν (Jo gar kairoVs egguvs estin, "for the time is near"). "With speed" or "shortly" can mean nothing else than the events are close at hand or are just around the corner.

These events were to begin with the people to whom the book was written, not to thousands of generations in the future. Following this line of internal evidence to date the Book of Revelation correctly, the second internal evidence focused upon the identity of the beast, which number is listed as 666, which number is the number of a man. This number is associated with the sixth emperor of the Roman Empire, namely Nero Caesar. Third, the internal evidence focused upon the five kings that had fallen and the one that John describes as "one is," which is Nero Caesar. The way to date the Book of Revelation is with internal evidence, that is to say, within the book itself.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] See Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., "ταψχö tacos" in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:338.

[3] Fredrick C. Grant, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1922), 232-232. Also, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 37-47 for an excellent treatment of the number of the beast.

[4] Bob Emery, *An Evening in Ephesus with John, the Son of Thunder* (Charlottesville, VA: BenchPress Publishing, 1998), 82-83.

[5] For this chart, see David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), 352.

[6] Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Book of Revelation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1966), 299.

[7] *Gematria*, that is to say, Geometry, or the numerical indication of names.

[8] F. W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co, 1882), 471. See also David H. van Daalen, "Six Hundred Sixty-six," in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 700. For a thorough detail analysis of "The Number of the Beast," see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, Revised Edition (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2002), 37-50.

[9] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 436.

[10] Renan, *Renan's Antichrist*, translated by William G. Hutchison (London: Walter Scott, 1899), 215.

[11] Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, 464.

[12] Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, vol. 1, Aeneid, VI: 780-784, Loeb Classical Library, translated by H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1909, 2004), 587, 589. Note: the numbers (780-784) represent the number of lines on the page. The number 780 represents the first line.

[13] Ovid, *Tristia, Ex Ponto,* vol. 6, Tristia, V: 66-71, Loeb Classical Library, translated by A. L. Wheeler, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1924, 2002), 33.

[14] Martial, *Epigrams,* vol. 1, *On the Spectacles*, iv: 64, Loeb Classical Library, translated and edited by D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, 2002), 331. The number 64 represents a paragraph, not lines.

[15] Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Beast of Revelation*, revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 12.

[16] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 432. The highlight (underlining) belongs to me—Dallas Burdette.

[17] Arthur Weigall, *Nero: Emperor of Rome* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1930, 1934), 77, 289.

[18] Josephus, *The Jewish War,* Books III--IV, 4. 9. 2, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 303.

[19] Ibid., 305.

[20] Kenneth Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, revised edition (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2002), 141. I am deeply indebted to Gary Gentry for his many voluminous endnotes, which has greatly eased my load in locating the sources for this study. Henry Campbell Black writes:

> *De facto:* In fact, in deed, actually. This phrase is used to characterize and officer, a government, a past action, or a state of affairs which must be acceptied for all practical purpose, but is illegal or illegitimate. In this sense

it is the contrary of *de jure*, which means rightful, legitimate, just, or constitutional, in Henery Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, *4th edition* (St. Paul: Minn: West Publishing Co, 1951), 479.

[21] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xi. In this essay, I, Dallas Burdette, refer to many scholars with whom I disagree, but this disagreement does not questioned their integrity or their relationship to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This essay is designed to assist individuals in their quest for a better understanding of God's Word, not to impugn the motives of Godly men and women who disagree with my conclusions.

[22] Ibid., 14.

[23] "Augustus, whose rule is here reckoned from the death of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. to his own death in A.D. 14," see footnote 'd' in Josephus, *The Jewish War,* Books XVIII--XIX, 18. 3. 2, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 29.

[24] Ibid., 29.

[25] Josephus, *The Jewish War,* Books I--III, I. XLIX.--L, Loeb Classical Library, translated by D. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 137.

[26] Tacitus, *Tacitus Histories,* ,vol., 2 Books I--III, I. 49, Loeb Classical Library, translated by Clifford H. Moore (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1925, 2003), 83.

[27] A. M Renwick, "Roman Empire and Christianity," in G.W. Bromiley, General Editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, 4 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4:208.

[28] G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921, 1964), 77.

[29] "Caesar," in John W. Simpson, Jr., Philip A. Frank, Timothy P. Jenney, Ralph W. Vunderink, Associate Editors, and Allen C. Myers, Revision Editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 179.

Identity and Character of the Beast Of Revelation

Thrust Statement: **The beast with the seven heads and ten horns represent Rome.**

Scripture Reading: **Revelation 13:1-8; 17:1-18**

As one peruses Chapters Thirteen and Seventeen of the Book of Revelation, one is immediately conscious of the role that the beast (θηρίον, qhrion) of these two chapters plays in one's interpretation of this apocalyptic book. Does the word *beast* carry within its bosom a two-fold depiction—Rome and Nero? What is the character of the "beast" in these two chapters? An answer to these questions also shed light on the date of the writing of this book, as already observed in Chapter One. This paper focuses on both the identity and the character of this beast that worked havoc among the saints of God. It appears from the Book of Revelation that the beast represents both an individual (Nero, see **Revelation 13:18** and **17:1-10**) as well as a government (Rome, see **Revelation 13**).

Identify of the Beast

Revelation 13 introduces one to the beast that is extremely terrible—"on each head a blasphemous name" (**13:1**). John describes the beast this way: "Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, 'Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?'" (**Revelation 13:4**).[1] John does not leave the reader in the dark as to the identification of this beast. He begins his identification by saying: "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name" (**13:1**). As stated above, the beast in Revelation carries a twofold imagery. John, at times, employs the term beast to describe a kingdom and sometimes to portray a particular person, such as Nero. In other words, John moves back and forth between the generic and specific usages of the word *beast* as he seeks to capture the full import of Rome with its sixth emperor—one who is bestial, or inhuman, in his nature.

Satan, according to John, gave the beast (Rome) that came up out of the sea its power (**13:2**). John's description of this beast is of a political nature; he speaks of "ten

horns," "seven heads," "ten crowns" on his horns," and on the head of each of the seven heads, there is a "blasphemous name" (**13:1**). John continues to describe this beast that came up out of the sea as a beast of a composite nature—one whose characteristic attributes consist of a leopard, a bear, and a lion (**13:2**). One's reflection upon John's phraseology is reminiscent of Daniel's vision of animals representing world powers (**Daniel 8**). John's narrative, too, points toward civil powers. What world authority does this beast represent? The author of Revelation does not leave one wondering. An angel reveals to John the interpretation of this mystery:

> [9] "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. [10] They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. [11] The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. [12] "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. (**Revelation 17:9-12**)

The "seven heads are seven hills' represent Rome itself, the city of the famed seven hills. Once more, one detects a dual meaning in the "seven heads." The seven heads not only represent the Seven Hills of Rome, but also the first seven emperors of Rome. The twelfth chapter of Revelation identifies "an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads," (**12:3**), which language of political power is also employed in **chapters 13** and **17**. The "red dragon" (Satan) uses Rome to "make war against the Lamb" (**17:14**). **Chapter 17** recalls the earlier mention of the onslaught against God's Son and the Christian community (**12:1-6**). Listen to John as he depicts in graphic language the onslaught of the empire against the people of God:

> A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. [2] She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. [3] Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. [4] His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. [5] She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. [6] The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (**12:1-6**)

The woman represents, so it seems, the church and her child; that is to say, the child represents converts to Christ. Paul describes this woman as "the Jerusalem that is above . . . and she is our mother" (**Galatians 4:26**). John also describes this same woman in **Revelation 21:2**: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." The 1,260 days in **12:6** is equivalent to the "42 months" given to the Gentiles to "trample on the holy city" (**11:1-3**). Jesus describes the forty-two months as the "times of the

Gentiles" (**Luke 21:24**). This computation of time represents the number of months that the beast waged war against Jerusalem—February AD 67 to August AD 70—and, at the same time, the number of months that Christians went into hiding. In other words, this same calculation of time (1,260 days) corresponds to the same point in time that many Christians fled to Pella in order to find refuge from the beast. Jesus spoke of this interlude in His Olivet Discourse:

> 15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[b] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. (**Matthew 24:15-21**)

Eusebius (AD 260-340) bears testimony that the church in Jerusalem, before the war, by divine testimony, fled to the mountain country of Pella, which is exactly what Jesus foretold as recorded by Matthew. Eusebius reports that

The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem, that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men.[2]

The attack against God's people by Nero began even before the actual attack against Jerusalem in February AD 67. Countless Christians suffered from his diabolical acts, not just in the Jerusalem onslaught. One understands from **Revelation 13** and **17** that the "red dragon with seven heads and ten horns" represent the Roman Empire with its emperors. Rome made war with the saints—the bride of Christ. Clement of Rome (AD 30—100) wrote about the atrocities committed against Christians by Nero:

> But to stop giving ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletic contenders in quite recent times. We should consider the noble examples of our own generation. 2. Because of jealously and envy the greatest and most upright pillars were persecuted, and they struggled in the contest even to death. 3. We should set before our eyes the good apostles. 4. There is Peter, who because of unjust jealously bore up under hardships not just once or twice, but many times; and having thus borne his witness he went to the place of glory that he deserved. Because of jealousy and strife Paul pointed the way to the prize for endurance. 6. Seven times he bore chains; he was sent into exile and stoned; he served as a herald in both the East and the West; and he received the noble reputations for his faith.[3]

Eusebius, as cited above, also wrote about Nero's madness against the saints of God. He wrote his account of Peter's and Paul's deaths:

When the rule of Nero was now gathering strength for unholy objects he began to take up arms against the worship of the God of the universe. It is not part of the present work to describe his depravity: many indeed have related his story in accurate narrative, and from them he who wishes can study the perversity of his degenerate madness, which made him compass the unreasonable destruction of so many thousands, until he reached that final guilt of sparing neither his nearest nor dearest, so that in various ways he did to death alike his mother, brothers, and wife, with thousands of others attached to his family, as though they were enemies and foes. But with all this there was still lacking to him this—that it would be attributed to him that he was the first of the emperors to be pointed out as a foe of divine religion. This again the Latin writer Tertullian mentions in one place as follows: "Look at your records: there you will find that Nero was the first to persecute this belief when, having overcome the whole East, he was specially cruel in Rome against all. We boast that such a man was the author of our chastisement; for he who knows him can understand that nothing would have been condemned by Nero had it not been great and good."

In this way then was he the first to be heralded as above all a fighter against God, and raised up to slaughter against the Apostles. It is related that in his time Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified, and the title of "Peter and Paul," which is still given to the cemeteries there, confirms the story, no less than does a writer of the Church named Caius, who lived when Zephyrinus was Bishop of Rome.[4]

From these citations, one is immediately conscious that Rome becomes the Devil's agent. Paul is beheaded and Peter is crucified. In chapter one of this study (The Date of Revelation), the number of the beast in **Revelation 13:18** was identified with Nero. Also, in this earlier section, the sixth king in **Revelation 17:10** was also identified as Nero. The internal evidence, as set forth in Chapter One of this study, also focused upon statements by John about the "time is near" (**1:3**). John begins and ends the Book of Revelation with a consciousness that the events portrayed throughout this book are close by, that is to say, at one's doorsteps. The beast is not some political person two thousand years in the future, but rather, the beast is associated with one of that period, namely, Nero.[5]

Just a casual reading of the first three chapters of Revelation reveals that the beast is related to the first century Christians, which relevance is discovered in the seven historical churches located in Asia Minor; otherwise, one wonders why John writes: "To the seven churches in the province of Asia" (**1:4**). This deluge of persecution existed throughout the Empire. This letter is of such urgency, that John addresses the seven churches of Asia with his own comments leading up to the words of Jesus Himself:

> 9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." (**1:9-11**)

John identifies his age and time as that persecution which had already begun to take shape and form. In **1:9** he writes, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Then in his first letter to the churches, he calls attention to the suffering of Christians in *Ephesus*. John writes the direct words of Jesus, not his words, but Jesus' words: "You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" (**2:3**). Then, John records the words of Christ to the church in *Smyrna*, a church that is about to suffer:

> I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. [10] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (**2:9-10**)

As Jesus addresses the third church—*Pergamum*—He addresses the faithfulness of this church in spite of their trials: "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives" (**2:13**). To the church in *Philadelphia*, Jesus issued a waver from the impending persecution: " Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (**3:10-11**).

As demonstrated above, the beast that came up out of the sea was none other than Rome in a generic sense but in a specific sense Nero. Rome is the ancient city associated or distinguished by its seven mountains, which is also identified as seven kings (**17:10**). John writes to seven historical churches in Asia Minor (**1:4, 11**) to warn them of the impending persecution and, at the same time, to give them words of comfort. Since the Book of Revelation was written to the Christians of the first century, one can understand why John encouraged the churches to read, to hear, and to heed the things recorded in this apocalyptic book. "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (**1:3**).

In His first letter to the Ephesians, the Lord Jesus calls attention to the necessity of listening: " He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (**2:7**). Then in the closing of the Book, Jesus again expresses the nearness of the events and the necessity of keeping the words of this particular prophecy (Revelation): "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book" (**22:7**). If one puts himself or herself into shoes of those who lived in the first century, one surely would identify the seven-hilled city of Rome as the beast of **Revelation 17:10-11**. The words in **17:10-11** graphically depict the Roman Empire with its tributaries: "They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is,

the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. [11] The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."

One can hardly reflect upon these words of John without a recall of Daniel's words concerning the fourth world empire:

> [40] Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. [41] Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. [42] As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. [43] And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. [44] "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (**Daniel 2:40-44**)

The army of Rome possessed such power that it could destroy anything in its path. Michael Grant spoke of the Roman army as one of the best in the world: "This situation did not come about all at once. But when it did, it continued for five hundred years and exercised profoundly far-reaching effects on all subsequent history. For this was one of the greatest and most formidable armies that has ever existed."[6] The army of Rome was in essence a fighting machine. Josephus (AD 37—101) comments upon the power and effectiveness of this gigantic power, which is the beast that came up out of the Abyss (**17:8**) and out of the sea (**13:1**):

> This perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peace-time and in war welds the whole into a single body; so compact are their ranks, so alert their movements in wheeling to right or left, so quick their ears for orders, their eyes for signals, their hands to act upon them. Prompt as they consequently ever are in action, none are slower than they in succumbing to suffering, and never have they been known in any predicament to be beaten by numbers, by ruse, by difficulties of ground, or even by fortune; for they have more assurance of victory than of fortune. Where counsel thus precedes active operations, where the leaders' plan of campaign is followed up by so efficient an army, no wonder that the Empire has extended its boundaries on the east to the Euphrates, on the west to the ocean, on the south to the most fertile tracts of Libya, on the north to the Ister and the Rhine. One might say without exaggeration that, great as are their possessions, the people that won them are greater still.[7]

One can say that this beast is none other than Nero, the sixth Emperor of the Roman Empire. Nero was mad with power. Seneca (4 BC—AD 65), counselor to Nero, wrote in the first person concerning Nero's arbitrary and unbridled power:

> Have I of all mortals found favour with Heaven and been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods? I am the arbiter of life and death for the nations; it rests in my power what each man's lot and state shall be; by my lips Fortune proclaims what gift she would bestow on each human being; from my utterance peoples and cities gather reasons for rejoicing; without my favour and grace no part of the wide world can prosper; all those many thousands of swords which my peace restrains will be drawn at my nod; what nations shall be utterly destroyed, which banished, which shall receive the gift of liberty, which have it taken from them, what kings shall become slaves and whose heads shall be crowned with royal honour, what cities shall fall and which shall rise—this it is mine to decree.[8]

Nero was born on "December 15th, A.D.37."[9] Nine days after his birth, in the presence of Caligula, he was given the name Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, but later he came to be known as Nero. Weigall states: "He came into the world feet first, which was considered a very bad omen."[10] Weigall's comments about Nero's father may account for Nero's abominable behavior later in life: "He was a simple, unabashed, downright man, perfectly aware of his sins, and quite frankly untroubled by them."[11] Suetonius (AD 70—160), too, wrote that the father of Nero was "a man hateful in every walk of life."[12] Suetonius also records the prediction about his birth in very negative terms:

> Many people at once made many direful predictions from his horoscope, and a remark of his father Domitius was also regarded as an omen; for while receiving the congratulations of his friends, he said that 'nothing that was not abominable and a public bane could be born of Agrippina and himself.[13]

Nero's character emerged at an early age. He was adopted by Claudius "in the eleventh year of his age" and then "consigned to the training of Annaeus Seneca, who then was already a senator."[14] The "cruelty of his disposition" became apparent almost immediately after his adoption. When his brother Britannicus, after his adoption, greeted him as Ahenobarbus, Nero immediately tried to convince his father (Claudius) that Britannicus was a 'changeling.' Also when his aunt Lepida was accused, he publicly gave testimony against her, to gratify his mother, who was using every effort to ruin Lepida."[15] After Nero's mother poisoned Claudius, Nero was proclaimed Emperor. The first five years of his rule was characterized as good government. Later he had Britannicus poisoned and eventually had his mother banished from the palace. After depleting the state funds, funds that had been accumulated by his father, he resorted to confiscation of "estates of rich nobles against whom the new praetorian prefect Tigellinus could contrive the slightest charge."[16] Suetonius also wrote about his wickedness, corruption, law breaking, and so on:

> Although at first his acts of wantonness, lust, extravagance, avarice and cruelty were gradual and secret, and might be condoned as follies of youth, yet even then their nature was such that no one doubted that they were defects of his character and not due to his time of life. . . . He would even break into shops and rob them, setting up a market in the Palace, where he

> divided the booty which he took, sold it at auction, and then squandered the proceeds. In the strife which resulted he often ran the risk of losing his eyes or even his life, for he was beaten almost to death by a man of the senatorial order, whose wife he had maltreated.[17]

Once again, Suetonius revealed the sordid life of this beast, the beast that John describes as the beast of the sea. Suetonius wrote:

> Besides abusing freeborn boys and seducing married women, he debauched the vestal virgin Rubria. The freedwoman Acte he all but made his lawful wife, after bribing some ex-consuls to perjure themselves by swearing that she was of royal birth. He castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his house attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that kind of wife.[18]

Tacitus (AD 56—117) also complained about the ruthlessness of this tyrant:

> After the slaughter of so many of the noble, Nero in the end conceived the ambition to extirpate virtue herself by killing Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus. To both he was hostile from of old, and against Thrasea there were additional motives; for he had walked out of the senate, as I have mentioned, during the discussion on Agrippina, and at the festival of the Juvenalia his services had not been conspicuous—a grievance which went the deeper that in Patavium, his native place, the same Thrasea had sung in tragic costume at the Games instituted by the Trojan Antenor.[19]

Tacitus also gives a graphic description of the horrendous crimes committed against Christians. In his detailed account, one sees the ultimate in human depravity. Nero, according to Tacitus, was responsible for the fire in Rome. In order to throw off suspicion from himself, he accused Christians. The following is Tacitus' remarks about Nero's diabolical nature:

Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontitus Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Garden for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due

to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.[20]

Apollonius of Tyana (4 BC—AD 96), a pagan writer, as well, wrote about the bestial nature of Nero. He referred to him as a beast:

Moreover, in traversing more of the earth than any man yet has visited, I have seen hosts of Arabian and Indian wild beasts; but as to this wild beast, which the many call a tyrant, I know not either how many heads he has, nor whether he has crooked talons and jagged teeth. In any case, thought this monster is said to be a social beast and to inhabit the heart of cities, yet he is no much wilder and fiercer in his disposition than animals of the mountain and forest, that whereas you sometimes tame and alter the character of lions and leopards by flattering them, this one is only roused to greater cruelty than before by those who stroke him, so that he rends and devours all alike. And again there is no animal anyhow of which you can say that it ever devours its own mother, but Nero is gorged with such quarry.[21]

CONCLUSION

The characteristics, mentioned above, reveals the wicked nature of the beast that came up out of the sea (**Revelation 13:1-7**), which is also described as the sixth king (**17:10**). A perusal of the original writings of those who lived during this time period reveal that Nero was possessed of an exceedingly depraved and immoral character. Sir Paul Harvey, writes: "He was of a cruel and unrestrained brutality, with a passion for self-advertisement, especially by spectacular display."[22] Miriam T. Griffin goes right to the heart of the opinions about Nero, one of the seven heads on the beast that John witnessed coming up out of the sea. She puts into words the scandal of Nero's reputation:

Commenting on the unanimity of opinion about the Emperor Nero that prevails among the ancient authorities, the historian Charles Merivale wrote, 'With some allowance only for extravagance of colouring, we must accept in the main the verisimilitude of the picture they have left us of this arch-tyrant, the last and the most detestable of the Caesarean family.' Though there were historians who wrote laudatory accounts while Nero was alive, their verdict was overturned after his death and their works have not survived. It could hardly be otherwise. For Nero was the first Princeps to be declared a public enemy by the Senate. Moreover, his failure as Princeps led to a series of bloody civil wars that recalled the death agonies of the Republic, which had continued to haunt the Roman imagination.[23]

Griffin's comments are also informative concerning the early church's identification of Nero as the "antichrist." She writes:

In comparable Christian outpourings, Nero is the Anti-Christ whose persecution of the Christians heralds the destruction of Rome. This view of Nero as Anti-Christ continued to be celebrated by the Church Fathers and by later Christian writers. The picture of him as the incarnation of evil triumphed as Christianity triumphed.[24]

The identity of the beast is none other than Nero. His character is that of wild beasts. In conclusion, it is appropriate to cite Suetonius (AD 70—160) once more

concerning the depravity of this emperor. He relates the following story, which narrative reinforces the beastly nature of the beast of **Revelation 13** and **17**:

He so prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes, and when he had sated his mad lust, was finished off by his freedman Doryphorus; for he was even married to this man in the same way that he himself had taken Sporus, going so far as to imitate the cries and lamentations of a maiden being deflowered. I have heard from some men that it was his unshaken conviction that no man was chaste or pure in any part of his body, but that most of them concealed their vices and cleverly drew a veil over them; and that therefore he pardoned all other faults in those who confessed to him their lewdness.[25]

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[b] Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11

[2] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*,, [Loeb edition, vol., 153], vol., 1, Books 1-4, III, v. 3-5 Loeb Classical Library, edited by Jeffrey Henderson and with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1926, 2001), 201.

[3] Clement of Rome, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, [Loeb edition, vol., 24], vol., 1, First Clement 6: 1-6, Loeb Classical Library, edited by Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2003, 2005), 43-45.

[4] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*,, [Loeb edition, vol., 153], vol., 1, Books 1-4, II, xxv. 2-6 Loeb Classical Library, edited by Jeffrey Henderson and with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1926, 2001), 179, 181.

[5] (see **1:3** and **22:6**—reread Chapter One of this study for a detailed analysis of the speed with which the coming catastrophe is to occur—the destruction of Jerusalem).

[6] Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars* (New York: M. Evans & Company, Inc, 1974), xv.

[7] Josephus, *The Jewish War*,, [Loeb edition, vol., 487], Books 3-4, iii. v. vii, Loeb Classical Library, translated by H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1927, 1997), 35, 37.

[8] Seneca, *Moral* Essays, Volume 1,, [Loeb edition, vol., 214], "To the Emperor Nero on Mercy," Book I. i. 2-5, Loeb Classical Library, translated by John W. Basore (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1928, 2003), 357, 359.

[9] Arthur Weigall, *Nero: Emperor of Rome* (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd. 1930, 1934), 25.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars, Volume II,, [Loeb edition, vol., 38], "Nero," Book vi. iii. v, Loeb Classical Library, edited and translated by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1914, 1997), 89.

[13] Ibid., 91.

[14] Ibid., 93.

[15] Ibid.

[16] S. Angus and A. M. Renwick, "Nero," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, four volumes, revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 3:521.

[17] Suetonius, "Nero," in the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, [Lobe edition, vol., 38], vol., 2., XXVI, 123, 124.

[18] Ibid., XXVII, 127.

[19] Tacitus, *Annals,* Books XIII--XVI, vol., 5 [Loeb edition, vol., 322], Book XVI, Loeb Classical Library, translated by John Jackson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1937, 1999), 367, 369.

[20] Ibid., XLIV, 283, 285.

[21] Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana*, vol., 1 [Loeb edition, vol., 16], Book IV. XXXVIII, Loeb Classical Library, translated by F. C. Conybeare (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1917, 2004), 437, 438.

[22] Sir Paul Harvey, "Nero," in Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical* Literature (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 287.

[23] Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The end of a Dynasty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984, 1985), 15.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars, Volume II,, [Loeb edition, vol., 38], "Nero," XXIX, Loeb Classical Library, edited and translated by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1914, 1997), 127, 129.

Last Days in the Old and New Testaments

Thrust Statement: **The "last days" in Scripture concerns the final destruction of the nation of Judah in AD 70.**

Scripture Reading: **Genesis 49:1-10; Daniel 12:4-7; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.**

Have you ever said, "We are living in the last days"? If so, you are not alone. The New Testament speaks of the "last days." The Old Testament speaks of the "last days." What does this phrase mean? Christians frequently speak of the "end of time" as the "last days" of planet earth, even though neither the Old nor New Testament writings ever speak of the "end of time," but rather of the "time of the end" (**Daniel 12:4**). Some apply this phrase to the Christian age. In other words, Christians are still living in the "last days" in the twenty-first century. Since both the Old and the New Testaments address the "last days," one must seek to understand this terminology in light of the overall view of God's Word. One of the most popular views of the "last days" centers on the so-called final conflict that is commonly called the Battle of Armageddon[1] in the Book of Revelation (**Revelation 16:16**). If one is to arrive at a biblical concept, one must approach the subject from its use by both Old and New Testament writers. If one fails to understand the author's intent, one can attach a meaning that is totally lacking in biblical signification. Too many Christians are so used to reading the Bible from earlier generations of interpreters that they no longer focus on the original intent of the author. As one approaches this subject of the "last days," one must learn to reinterpret the hand-me-down interpretations from his or her own culture.[2]

Frequently, church leaders become the watchword for the interpretation of a particular text. Presuppositions often stand in the way of listening anew to the passage under scrutiny. Scholars as well as individuals often prune or crop the text in order to

justify their interpretation of a specific text or texts, even though this may not be intentional. One may prune the wording of a verse by failing to take into consideration the historical background leading up to the comments of the inspired writer dealing with issues spoken of by various prophets. Unfortunately, uninspired individuals take great liberties with texts in order to give validity to their opinions, which interpretations often border on the fringes of one's wild imagination.

It is not uncommon for Christians to isolate a passage from its context, which separation supports, so it seems, bizarre interpretations of prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Cropping of a text is similar in nature to the pruning of a text. When one crops a text, one fails to read the text in its narrative setting. One in essence breaks the connection between the verse cited and the verses preceding and following. In order to interpret the Word of God more accurately, one must step outside one's frame of reference; otherwise, one will experience subjective distortions of the intended text of study. Every commentator must seek to eliminate his or her strong personal subjective biases, that is to say, one should avoid looking through one's own colored glasses.

The views set forth in this essay are that the "last days" picture the "last days" of the Old Covenant world of Judaism, which days are foretold by Jacob (2006-1859 BC) to Judah (see **Genesis 49:1, 10**). The "last days" dealt with the first century Jews, not twenty-first century Christian. In other words, the "last days" have come and gone for the church today. The "last days" of Judaism culminated in the downfall of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans. The "last days" are not the end of the world, but rather the end of that system set up in types and shadows—the old heaven and earth. This author, Dallas Burdette, taught for many years that the "last days" pertained to the Messianic age, that is to say, the Christian dispensation, or the entirety of the Christian age, not the "last days" of the Old Covenant world of Judaism addressed by Jacob, Daniel, and many other prophets. The traditional interpretation (Christian dispensation) allows for the "last days" continuing for thousands of years. Yet, the Scriptures do not uphold this interpretation, that is to say, that Christians are still living in the "last days."[3]

BOOK OF HEBREWS

The "last days" are a reference to the "last days" of Judah's judgment that came to an end in AD 70. A proper understanding of this expression should assist one in the interpretation of many texts that are presently misapplied by many sincere believers. The Book of Hebrews begins its comments about the "last days" of Judah's demise with the following words: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (**Hebrews 1:1-2**).[4] "In these last days" identifies the ministry of Jesus to the period of the "last days" of Judah's existence as a political power.[5] "In these last days" is also buttressed with "through whom he made the universe," which translation is misleading. The KJV translates "by whom also he made the worlds." This text speaks of "ages" in the Greek text, not "worlds."[6] Just a perusal of the Book of Hebrews reveals that the "ages" represent the old covenant and new covenant ages.

Christians today are **not** living in the "last days," but rather they are living in the age of grace.

The English word *world* is employed again in **1:6** (KJV). But the Greek word is οἰκουμένη (oikoumenh, "inhabited [earth]), Roman Empire"), not αἰών (aiwn, "age"). The author of Hebrews does not employ the same Greek word that is translated "world" in **1:6** that is employed in **1:2**. The writer pens: "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world,[7] he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'"[d] The word that the author writes in **1:2** (aiwnas, "ages") is the same word that Jesus uses in His discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem in **Matthew 24:3**: "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age [τοῦ αἰῶνος, tou aiwnos]?'" Unfortunately, the KJV translates the word *age* as *world* in **24:3**. The Greek word for *world* is κόσμος (kosmos, "world" or "universe"). The Twelve were not inquiring about the end of the world (literal heavens and earth, but rather, they were asking about the end of the Old Covenant world of Judaism, that is to say, "the time of the end," not the "end of time" (see **Daniel 12:4**).

Again, **Hebrews 1:10-12** sheds light on the earlier verses. Listen once more to the writer of Hebrews as he pens:

> In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. [11]They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. [12]You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."[g]

These words are reminiscent of the words of John in his Revelation book. He graphically depicts the final overthrow of Judah with similar apocalyptic language:

> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, [13] and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. [14] The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. [16] They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! [17] For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (**Revelation 6:12-17**)

One is confronted with apocalyptic language that is descriptive of the overthrow, or downfall, of governments. Isaiah uses the same type imagery when he writes about the removable from power of Babylon (**Isaiah 13:9-13**) and Idumea (**34:1-5**). Isaiah writes with apocalyptic language that is similar to the author of the Book of Hebrews as well as the Book of Revelation by John. One should pay close attention to the following account of Babylon's downfall by Isaiah:

See, the day of the LORD is coming —a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger— to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. [10]The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. [11]I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. [12]I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. [13]Therefore I will make the **heavens tremble**; and the **earth will shake** from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. (**Isaiah 13:9-13**)

This account of Babylon's demise is referred to as "the day of the LORD is coming." Also, Isaiah speaks of the "rising sun" and the moon being "darkened." This removal of Babylon is referred to as the "heavens" trembling and the "earth" shaking, which comes about as a result of God's wrath. Isaiah's account of the fall of Idumea is also filled with apocalyptic language—the same language employed by John in his Revelation (**Revelation 6:12-17**) as he describes the defeat of apostate Judah. Once more, pay attention to Isaiah's words:

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! [2]The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy[a] them, he will give them over to slaughter. [3]Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. [4]All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. [5]My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. (**Isaiah 34:1-5**)

This language is the same language that Jesus employed in His discourse on the "End of the Age" as recorded in **Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21**. Jesus alludes to **Joel 2:28** when He says: "Immediately after the distress of those days, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken"'[c] (**Matthew 24:29**). Joel, too, writes in apocalyptic language. The following citation from Joel should assist one in understanding more clearly the words of Jesus in **Matthew 24**:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29]Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. [30]I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [3]The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. (**Joel 2:28-31**)

Isaiah and Joel and Jesus shed light on the Book of Hebrews. Surface reading of **Hebrews 1:10-12** seem to imply that the author is writing about the literal heavens

and earth. Yet, the Book of Hebrews is not discussing the literal heavens and earth, but rather, the author is speaking of the Old Covenant world of Judaism as "heavens" and "earth." Gene Fadeley is on target, so it seems, when he writes:

> Beginning in verse ten, the term **"heaven and earth"** has been the source of much misunderstanding. Some words used in the Bible are peculiar to our thinking. When we read these words we need to understand them in the way they were used. The term **"heaven and earth"** was sometimes used to denote the Jewish Old Covenant world. It was that old Jewish system that was about to end. The physical universe was not the topic shown in verse 11 when he says, **"They will perish, but you will remain."** If the physical earth was to be destroyed, where were the Jewish Christians to remain?[8]

In order to set forth, or drive home the point, that the concept of the "heaven and earth" refers to the kingdom of Judah, one should, once more, consult the Book of Isaiah to confirm this understanding. Isaiah speaks of Judah and Jerusalem in symbolic terms in the introduction of his book (**Isaiah 1:1-2**). He employs the words *heaven* and *earth* as descriptive terms to convey to the nation of Judah that they should listen to God's warnings. Pay attention to him as he rebukes a rebellious nation:

> Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." 4Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. (**1:2-4**)

From this citation, one is immediately aware that Isaiah calls Judah "heaven and earth." One can hardly reflect upon these words without recalling the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount as He rebukes the religious leaders for tampering with the true intent of Holy Scripture. Jesus calls attention to the fact that Judaism (heaven and earth) would disappear before the "least stroke of a pen" would disappear from the Law, that is to say, until everything the Law and the prophets had foretold would come to past.

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (**Matthew 5:17-20**)

One is conscious that Jesus is referring to the passing away of the scepter (power) of Judah, which He describes as "heaven and earth." Toward the end of

Christ's ministry, He once more addresses this same issue of the falling away of the Old Covenant world of Judaism. Just a brief reading of the three accounts is given in **Matthew 24-25, Mark 13**, and **Luke 21**, which scenarios reveal the full story of what is in the "kernel" form in **Matthew 5:17-20**. The following words by Gene Fadeley are on target as he seeks to unravel the true meaning of "heaven and earth":

> If the terms "heaven and earth" had reference to the physical heaven and earth, one must conclude that until the physical heaven and earth are destroyed, the old Mosaic law would be in force. However the terms "heaven and earth" had reference to the old and new covenant worlds. The old Jewish covenant could not pass until everything was accomplished. The final promises, prophecies, and judgments were about to be completed. Once these things were completed, the old covenant, having been fulfilled, would pass away. When we view these events in their correct first century setting, Matthew 5:18 and many other passages become easy to understand.[9]

The covenant world of Judaism would cease to exist, which is called "heaven and earth." God foretold the destruction of Judaism in **Deuteronomy 32**,[10] which is known as the Song of Moses. Fourteen hundred years before Judaism ceased to exist, Moses (1526-1406 BC) writes: "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death[e] below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains" (**32:22**). Paul cites the verse above (**32:21**) to justify his ministry to the Gentiles (**Romans10:19**), which context reveals that God refers to the destruction of Judah. Moses pens these informative words from God: '"I will hide my face from them,' he said, 'and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding'" (**Deuteronomy 32:21-22; Romans 10:19**). This song begins with the following words: "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth" (**32:1**).

An understanding of **Hebrews 1:1-2** gives clarity to the author's warning in **Hebrews 10:25**. In this passage (**10:25**), the author warns his readers about the impending destruction of Judaism. The author writes: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching".[11] The "Day approaching" is not Sunday, but rather it is the complete overthrow of apostate Judaism by the Romans in AD 70. Earlier, this same author of Hebrews alerts his readers to the passing away of this Old Covenant world of Judaism: "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (**8:13**).[12] This expression ("last days") refers to the time frame of the first century, not the twenty-first century. The author of Hebrews closes his book with a reference to the "heavenly Jerusalem" (**12:22**). The author deals with the "new heaven" and the "new earth" that represents the New Covenant world, not the physical universe. The author writes with conciseness:

> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in

heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (**12:22-24**)

This "heavenly Jerusalem" is the one that John describes in the Book of Revelation:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (**Revelation 21:1-4**)

This "new heaven and a new earth" is identical to the "new heaven and new earth" that Isaiah (739 BC), seven hundred years earlier, wrote about. He carved the following words into the minds of his readers about the ultimate glory of God's initiative in the redemption of humanity: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (**Isaiah 65:17**). In **65:1-16**, Isaiah describes the utter destruction of the kingdom of Judah and then announces the "new heavens and a new earth." The "new heaven and a new earth" represents the New Covenant world and "the first heaven and the first earth" represents the Old Covenant world of Judaism.[13]

BOOK OF JOEL

Another book that sheds light on the "last days" is the Book of Joel. The Holy Spirit, through Joel, calls attention to events that will transpire during the final days ("last days") of the world of Judaism, which "last days," Jesus explains in **Matthew 24**, **Luke 21**, and **Mark 13**. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter describes the events transpiring on that day as the beginning of the "last days" spoken of by Joel (835 BC). "In the last days,[14] God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (**Acts 2:17**). The Holy Spirit being poured out was the beginning of the end of the nation of Judah. The full text of Peter's citation from **Joel 2:28-32** sheds light upon this phrase, "in the last days." One recognizes apocalyptic language concerning the elements of the universe, elements that are metaphorical in meaning, not literal. Listen to Peter's words as he cites Joel's prophecy:

> In the last days, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20] The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to

blood before the coming of the great and glorious [ἐπιφανῆ, epifanh, "manifest"] day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."[a] (**Acts 2:17-21**)

"Before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord" is employed by Peter of judgment on the nation of Judah for its rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah. The NIV translates ἐπιφανῆ (epifanh) as "glorious." This word is a compound adjective composed of ἐπί (epi, "upon, over") and φανής (fanhs, "bright, conspicuous"). This word indicates that the day of the Lord is awesome. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word of **Joel 2** represents something to be feared or awe-inspiring or terrible. Even though the Greek carries the idea of something brilliant or notable, nevertheless, the idea of the Greek word epifanh is ultimately the same—a dreadful day. The "last days" are equivalent to judgment of Judah in the Book of Revelation.

The events referred to by the author of Hebrews and Peter are the fulfillment of the events foretold by Daniel (605 BC) in **Daniel 12:4-7**. In this section, Daniel speaks of the "time of the end," not the "end of time" (**12:4**). Daniel wanted to know "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled" (**12:6**)? Michael responds by saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time.[b] When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed" (**12:7**). The power of the holy people was finally broken in AD 70. Malachi (433 BC), too, writes about the "last days" of Judah:

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. [2] But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. [3] Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty. [4] "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. [5] "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. [6] He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (**Malachi 4:1-6**)

When John the Baptist arrives on the scene, one sees him in the wilderness announcing the coming kingdom prophesied by the prophet Daniel [605 BC] (**Daniel 2, 7, 9**) and, at the same time, announcing that great and dreadful day of the Lord as prophesied by the prophet Malachi [433 BC] (Malachi 4:1-6). Matthew reports John's ministry this way:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our

father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. [10] The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] "I baptize you with[b] water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (**Matthew 3:7-12**)

Just a casual reading of **Malachi 4** and **Matthew 3** reveals parallels between the two accounts—"that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes" by Malachi is parallel to John's "the coming wrath." When the "coming wrath" begins, it will last for forty-two months, which is equivalent to 1,260 days, which is equivalent to Daniel's "time, times and half a time" (**Daniel 12:7**). The Book of Revelation sheds light on the words of Daniel. Just a cursory reading of chapter eleven and twelve of John's Revelation, one is immediately informed that the "time, times and half a time" are equivalent to three and one-half years, which also corresponds to the forty-two months or 1,260 days (**Revelation 11:1-3**). According to John, during the final days of Judah, the church fled into the wilderness for the "time, times and half a time," which is the same time frame that Daniel writes about (**Daniel 12:7**). John also calls attention to the 1,260 days in **Revelation 12:6**.

When would these forty-two months take place? John identifies the events as taking place when the holy city was overrun by the Gentiles (Rome). Observe John's remarks as he captures the great day of God's wrath upon Judah: "But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it **has been given to the Gentiles**. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. [3] And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (**11:2-3**). This is the same event that Daniel writes about, as mentioned above, in the conclusion of his book. The events that John describes are associated with the events that Joel describes as the "last days." Remember the words of John as he elaborates on these forty-two months as "a time, times and half a time":

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. [14] The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. (**Revelation 12:13-15**)

Jesus addresses this event in His signs of the end of the Jewish age:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. [21] Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. [22] For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. [23] How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. [24] They will fall by the sword and will be taken as

prisoners to all the nations. **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**. [25]"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. [26] Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. [27] At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [28] When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (**Luke 21:20-28**)

Eusebius (AD 260-340) bears testimony that the church in Jerusalem, before the war, by divine testimony, fled to the mountain country of Pella, which is exactly what Jesus foretold as recorded by Matthew. Eusebius reports that

The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem, that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men.[15]

Remember, Joel, too, addresses this "great and terrible day of the Lord" (**Joel 2:28-32**). When will this event take place? As stated above, another piece of this puzzle is found in Malachi. Malachi (433 BC) associates this "great and dreadful day of the LORD" (**Malachi 4:5**) with the coming of Elijah.[16] Malachi writes: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. [6] He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (**4:5-6**). Again, "that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" is the same as "time of the end" spoken of by Daniel (**Daniel 12:4**) and also by John the Baptist to the religious leaders with his penetrating words of rebuke: "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath" (**Matthew 3:7**)? According to Malachi, Elijah would come before the power of the people would be finally broken. Jesus Himself cites the prophecy from Malachi about Elijah as having its fulfillment in the coming of John the Baptist (**Matthew 11:10**). Jesus unfolds the intent of the Holy Spirit with the following comments about the role and ministry of John the Baptist:

This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'[c] [11] I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. [13] For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [14] And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. [15] He who has ears, let him hear. (**11:10-15**)

LAST DAYS BY NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS

Paul, in writing his First Epistle to Timothy, uses a different expression to describe the "last days" of the world of Judaism. About AD 64, he writes: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times[17] some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (**1 Timothy 4:1**). In Paul's final letter to Timothy, he writes: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days" (**2 Timothy 3:1**).[18] Whether one says "in later times" or "in last days," one is saying one and the same thing. James,[19] the Lord's brother, also speaks of the "last days" as he issues his rebuke against those who have accumulated wealth without regard to the things of God (**James 5:1-3**): "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days" [ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, en escatais Jhmerais] (**5:3**). The end of their age was just around the corner.

Peter, too, addresses the "last days" in his First Epistle (AD 60s, before Nero's death in AD 68).[20] Peter speaks of those "kept by the power of God" in the "last time": "Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time[21] (**1 Peter 1:5**). Again, in **verse 20**, he writes: "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times[22] for your sake" (**1:20**). In his Second Epistle, he once more calls notification to the "last days" of Israel's demise: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days[23] scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires" (**2 Peter 3:3**).[24]

Jude, too, speaks of the "last days" of Israel with the following words: "They said to you, 'In the last times[25] there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires'" (**Jude 18**). John also refers to "time of the end" of Judaism when he writes: "Dear children, this is the last hour;[26] and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour[27] (**1 John 2:18**). Luke, like Matthew, records John the Immerser's message about the coming wrath: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? (**Luke 3:7**). Many of the disciples of Jesus recalled the words of John and Jesus concerning the "coming wrath" upon the holy city (Jerusalem) and left the city when they saw the armies of Rome approaching Jerusalem.

BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew relates a conversation between Jesus and His disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew recalls this interchange: "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" (**Matthew 24:3**). To this question, Jesus cautioned: "Watch out that no one deceives you" (**24:4**). What would signal the final days of God's wrath against the nation of Judah? Jesus calls notification to the words of the prophet Daniel in order to indicate how to determine when the time of the end for the holy people would arrive. He cites the words of Daniel who had previously spoken of the "time of the end": "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[b] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— [16]then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (**24:15-16**).[28] Luke gives additional comments by Jesus concerning the "last days" of Judah:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. [21] Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. [22] For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. (**Luke 21:20-22**)

BOOK OF GENESIS

As stated earlier, for many years, this author (Dallas Burdette) read the phrase "last days" to depict the last days of the Messianic age, which "last days" have been going on now for about 2000 years. T.V. evangelists and radio preachers are constantly referring to the "last days" as applicable to the twenty-first century, not the first century. Yet, on closer scrutiny, one discovers that both Old and New Testament writings employs this phrase to refer to the last days of the Old Covenant world of Judaism, not the Christian age. The "last days" of the world of Judaism with its Temple and rituals came to an end in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus clearly states, in His day, "This is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written." **Genesis 49:10** is one such Scripture that deals with the final overthrow of the house of Judah. He predicted what would happen in the "last days" of the world of Judaism. The destruction of Jerusalem is the fulfillment of **Genesis 49:1, 10**.

As recorded in **Genesis 49**, Jacob (2006-1886 BC)[29] called his children together to describe the end of Judaism. Moses (1526-1406 BC) records the following words of Jacob concerning the last days of Judaism: "Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come (**Genesis 49:1**). "In days to come" is translated in the KJV as "in the last days." The Hebrew reading of this phrase is בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים (B=a^jr!,t h^yy*m!,m, "in the end of days"). The Septuagint (LXX) renders this phrase as ἐπ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (ep escatwn twn Jherwn, "in the last days"). After Jacob informs each of his children, he then issues the final events that will take place in the "last days" concerning Judah. He says, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs[c] and the obedience of the nations is his" (**49:10**).[30]

The KJV translates this verse (**49:10**): "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Whether one translates the Hebrew as "until he comes to whom it belongs" or "until Shiloh come," both phrases have reference to the coming of the Messiah, that is to say the Christ. Jacob is specific concerning the Messiah coming before the last days, or the final days, of the nation of Judah, which nation actually suffered utter destruction by the Romans in AD 70. Jacob says that the scepter (שֵׁבֶט, v@b#t) would not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until "Shiloh" comes. Shiloh (שִׁילֹה, v!,l)h) seems to be a phrase meaning "He to whom it belongs, " and thus refers to the Messiah.[31]

The above analysis of Jacob's words is not out of harmony with other predictions, especially those Messianic promises issued to Abraham. For example, Jacob's grandfather, Abraham (2166-1991 BC),[32] received a promise from God concerning the coming of the Messiah. Moses records this promise in the Book of Genesis. Listen to Moses as he narrates this promise to Abraham:

> The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. [2]I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. [3]I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (**Genesis 12:1-3**)

This pledge is repeated again in **18:18**: "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him." Once more, God repeats this guarantee: "through your offspring[b] all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (**22:18**).[33]

Later, God confirmed the promise to Isaac. Over again, Moses writes:

> I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring[a] all nations on earth will be blessed, [5] because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." [6] So Isaac stayed in Gerar. (**26:4-6**)

This promise is reaffirmed to Jacob: "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring" (**28:14**). Remember, toward the end of his earthly life, Jacob called his children together and issued the prophetic promise concerning the ultimate end of the kingdom of Judah. God made a promise, as stated above to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, that in his grandfather's seed (זֶרַע, z#r^u) all nations would be blessed. Ultimately, the promise made to Satan (**3:14-15**) and Abraham (**12:3; 18:18; 22:17-18**) would come through an individual (Jesus) who would bring this universal blessing, who is described as "her seed." Moses reveals God's conversation to Satan: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers" (**3:15**). The One who is here called the 'seed of the woman' is later called the 'seed of Abraham.' Paul, over two thousand years after Abraham, referred to God's promise to Abraham this way: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,'[a] meaning one person, who is Christ" (**Galatians 3:16**).[34]

Paul refers to a phrase in **Genesis 3:15** in his Epistle to the Roman Christians (**Romans 16:20**) as having fulfillment in its totality in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Take note of Paul's words as he recalls God's conversation to Satan: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." The author of the Book of Hebrews also testifies to the finality of the crushing of Satan with the coming of Christ in judgment on apostate Jerusalem: "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (**Hebrews 9:28**). This "coming" is the second coming. In the removal of apostate Jerusalem, God made way for the final defeat of Satan in His shaking of the old heavens and earth (the world of Judaism) and the creation of new heavens and a new earth (the body of Christ, or the church).[35] Pay attention once more to the author of Hebrews as he writes:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn,[36] whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. [25] See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? [26] At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."[c] [27] The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (**Hebrews 12:22-27**)

When did God "shake not only the earth but also the heavens"? The Hebrew author identifies the above events as taking place "at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (**9:26**). "**The end of the ages**" is from the Greek ἐπὶ συντελεία τῶν αἰώνων (epi sunteleia twn aiwnwn), which can also be translated as, "at the completion of the ages." Jesus accomplished this feat during the final phase of the demise of the kingdom of Judah. In order to comprehend more fully this phrase "last days," it would be helpful to look at a few more Old Testament prophecies as well as New Testament citations to grasp the significance of this phrase by the writers of both Testaments.

BOOK OF ISAIAH

One of the first Scriptures that I learned as a boy preacher was **Isaiah 2:1-4**. Unfortunately, no one called attention to **chapters 3-4** in analyzing **2:2**. The "last days," in our interpretation, included the first century as well as the twentieth century (I started my preaching ministry in January 1951). For many believers, today, the "last days" also include the twenty-first century. We divided the time periods into three periods—Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. This same fellowship as well as many other fellowships still maintains that Christians are still living in the "last days." A close scrutiny of Isaiah reveals that he is writing about the final days of Israel's demise. Isaiah (739 BC) writes about the events that would occur during the final days of Israel prestige, or power, which power Daniel spoke of as coming to an end (**Daniel 12:7**). One of the ways that God's people know that the kingdom came into existence in the first century is that the kingdom would be established during the "last days," or the final days of Israel's power. Don Preston correctly states: "The *last days* would already be in existence when the kingdom would be established."[37] Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah with His establishment of His messianic kingdom during the final days of the kingdom of Judah. Listen to him as he pens his futuristic words:

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. [3] Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. [4]He will judge between the

nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (**Isaiah 2:2-4**)

"In the last days" (בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, b+a^j&r!,t h^yy*m!,m) is not a prediction of the last days of the church, but rather, it refers to the last days of Israel's existence. The Septuagint (LXX) translates the Hebrew text as ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (tais escatais Jhmerais), which the KJV translates as "the last days." In chapter two, Isaiah speaks of God judging Israel, which judgment ultimately took place in AD 70. In order for one to observe the impact of **2:2-4**, one should look at Isaiah's statements in **2:9-11** and **2:19-21**. It is significant that Jesus alludes to and cites both of these Scriptures as having reference to Jerusalem in His day (see **Luke 21:24; 23:28-31**). Pay attention to Isaiah as he describes the reaction of men and women who face persecution from the Romans in the first century, which army God employed to wreak havoc upon a nation that rejected His Messiah:

So man will be brought low and mankind humbled—do not forgive them.[a] 10 Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty! 11 The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. (**Isaiah 2:9-11**)

Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises **to shake the earth**. 20 In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship. 21 They will flee to caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises **to shake the earth**. (**2:19-21**)

Jesus, as stated above, cites **Isaiah 2:19** as having fulfillment in the "end of the ages." Following Luke's report of Jesus' reference to the end of Judaism in **Luke 21**, he again refers to comments by Jesus concerning Israel's rejection of Him as their Messiah (**23:28-30**). Jesus alludes to **Isaiah 2:19** on His way to crucifixion. Luke reports his comments and Jesus' words:

As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!' '[a] 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (**Luke 23:26-31**)

Luke 23:30 is a direct citation from **Isaiah 2:21**, which words relate to Israel's final days that are commonly referred to as "the last days." Even in **Isaiah 2:9-11**, one observes that Jesus alludes to these Scriptures in **Luke 23:28-30**. Also, John captures the words of Isaiah (**2:19-21**) in the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation (**Revelation 6:12-17**), which also depicts the overthrow of apostate Jerusalem. Listen to John as he

pens the following description of the events transpiring during the final days of Israel's political power:

> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, [13] and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. [14] The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. [16] They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! [17] For **the great day of their wrath has come**, and who can stand?" (**Revelation 6:12-17**)

From **Isaiah 2:2-4**, one knows that the Messianic kingdom would come into existence during the final days of Judah's power. Not only is **Isaiah 2:2** dealing with the final days, but **2:9-11** and **2:19-21** also describe the final days that Jesus speaks about as recorded in **Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21**. **Chapters 2-4** of Isaiah are simply reiterations of God's promise in **Deuteronomy 32** concerning punishment for disobedience, which chapter is commonly known as the Song of Moses that is descriptive of Israel's final downfall in AD 70. John, too, in his Book of Revelation, speaks of the seven last plagues, which, when finished, represented the final overthrow of Judaism. What John writes about is parallel to **Daniel 12**. John portrays the event of Judah's downfall this way:

> I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues[38]—last, because with them **God's wrath is completed**. [2] And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God [3] and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. [4]Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (**Revelation 15:1-4**)

This study has sought to examine the Scriptures concerning the "last days" objectively. Any examination of Scripture must endeavor to be true to the context, not tradition. As one seeks to unravel the true meaning of the expression "last days," one should remember the words of Luke in the Book of Acts: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (**Acts 17:11**).

[1] The Battle of Armageddon is called "the war of the great day of the Almighty God " in **Revelation 16:14** ("the war of the great day" in Greek is τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλη, ton polemon ths Jhmeras ths megalhs). The word *Armageddon* is incorrectly transliterated into English. The English translators left off the letter "h." The word in the Greek text is Ἀρμαγεδών (Jarmagedwn). John writes: τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀρμαγεδών (ton kaloumenon Jebraisti Jarmagedwn). The word that is transliteration as Armageddon means "Mount Megiddo." The NIV translates **16:14**: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Many battles took place in Israel's history at the foot of Mount Megiddo. This battle is descriptive of the time given to the Gentiles to tread underfoot the Holy city for a period of forty-two months.

[2] This essay is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the "last days," but rather a brief overview. For a comprehensive study in this field, one should consult Don K. Preston, *The Last Days* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Productions, 2004). This book may be ordered directly from Don Preston (see his website: www.eschatology.org).

[3] See John Noe, "The End that Was, the Last Days that Were," in John Noe, *Beyond the End Times* (Bradford, PA: Preterist Resources, 1999) for an excellent study on the last days (131-162). For information on his website, go to www.freedominchrist.net and click on ONLINE RESOURCES and then click on ESCHATOLOGY and then click on his website.

[4] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[5] "In these last days" (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων, ep escatou twn Jhmerwn toutwn)

[6] The Greek text reads: δι᾽ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας (di Jou kai epoihsen tous aiwnas, "through whom also [indeed] he made the ages")

[7] τὴν οἰκουμένην, thn oikouvmenhn, "the inhabited (earth)."

[d] Deut. 32:43 (see Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint).

[g] Psalm 102:25-27

[a] The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them; also in verse 5.

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[8] Gene Fadeley, *Hebrews: Covenants in Contrast* (1996, 2000), 9. To order this book, contact www.bibleprophecy.com.

[9] Ibid., 33

[10] One may place a date at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy as 1406 BC. The Book of Leviticus has no chronology, but the Book of Numbers covers a period of thirty-nine years, which book begins with 1445 BC. The Book of Exodus begins in flash back to 1876 BC until the birth of Moses in 1526 BC. Between Exodus 2:1 and 3:2, one observes a period of eighty years transpiring.

[c] Hebrew *to Sheol*

[11] ὅσῳ βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσαν τὴν ἡμέραν, Josw blepete eggizousan thn Jhmeran, "as you see the day approaching"

[12] ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ, eggus afanismou, "(is) near vanishing"

[13] For a fuller discussion of the new heavens and the new earth, see Dallas Burdette, "New Heaven and New Earth" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 13 March 2008), located under BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under NEW TESTAMENT and then under REVELATION.

[14] "In the last days," (ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, en tails escatais Jhmerais)

[a] Joel 2:28-32

b Or *a year, two years and half a year*

[b] Or *in*

[15] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*,, Books 1-5, III, v. 3-5 Loeb Classical Library, vol., 153, edited by Jeffrey Henderson and with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1926, 2001), 201.

[16] Since this subject is misunderstood by so many sincere Christians, repetition is necessary in order to drive home the true meaning of the "last days."

[c] Mal. 3:1

[17] "in latter times" (ἐν ὑστέρος καιροῖς, en Justeros kairois)

[18] "in the last days" [ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, en escatais Jhmerais]

[19] Some date the Book of James before AD 50, others after AD 60.

[20] Nero committed suicide in AD 68 during the month of June.

[21] "in the last time" [ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ, en kairw escatw]

[22] "in the last times" (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων, ep escatou twn cronwn, "in the last of the times")

[23] "in the last days" (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, ep escatwn twn Jhmerwn, "during the last of the days")

[24] For a more detailed study of **2 Peter 3**, see Dallas Burdette, "New Heavens and New Earth" [ONLINE], located on www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 9 March 2008), go to BIBLICAL STUDIES and then to NEW TESTAMENT and then to REVELATION.

[25] "in the last times" (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τοῦ χρόνου, ep excatou tou cronou, "the last of the time")

[26] "last hour" (ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, escath Jwra estin, "last hour it is")

[27]"last hour" (ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, escath Jwra estin, "last hour it is")

[b]**Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11**

[28] For a detailed study of **Matthew 24**, see John L. Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled* (Lakeland, Florida: John L. Bray, 1996, 20002). To order this book, write to John Bray, PO BOX 90129, Lakeland, Florida 33804, or call 863-858-6625.

[29] As one continues to move back in time, one can discover the date of Jacob's birth. One is indebted to Moses for a statement concerning a conversation that Jacob had with Pharaoh: "And Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage'" (**Genesis 47:9**). The sojourn of Jacob began in Egypt (1876 BC) when he stood before Pharaoh, thus the information from **Genesis 47:9** furnishes one with the additional knowledge to determine the date of Jacob's birth. Since Jacob told Pharaoh that he was 130 years old, then if one adds 130 years to the date that Jacob entered Egypt (1876 BC), one arrives at the date of 2006 B C as the date of Jacob's birth. See Dallas Burdette, "Biblical Chronology" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 9 March 2008) located under caption Biblical Studies and then under Old Testament and then under Overview of the Old Testament.

[c]Or *until Shiloh comes*; or *until he comes to whom tribute belongs*

[30] See Dallas Burdette, "Are You the One Who Was to Come?" for a more detailed study of "until he comes to whom it belongs" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 21 March 2008] located under Biblical Studies and then under New Testament and under Matthew.

[31] For a detailed study on "Shiloh," see David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person* (Los Angeles, California: Biblical Research Society, 1933), 46-54.

[32] Still moving back, one learns from **Genesis 21:5** that Abraham was born in 2166 BC.[32] Moses writes: "Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." Since Isaac was

born in 2066 BC, then by adding 100 to Isaac's birth, then one arrives at a date of 2166 BC for the birth of Abraham. Moses not only informs his readers about the birth of Abraham, but he also records the departure of Abraham from Haran to Canaan as occurring in the year 2091 BC: "So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran" (**Genesis 12:4**). If one begins the patriarchal period with Abram (Abraham), then one is considering a time span from 2091 BC when he left Haran until the time when the children of Israel entered Egypt in 1876 BC. This calculation (2091 minus 1876) is a total of 215 years. Some see the patriarchal period as extending from the time Abram left Haran in 2091 BC down to the death of Joseph, which is recorded in **Genesis 50:26**. Joseph's death occurred in 1805 BC. If one accepts this latter span, then one would have a period of 286 years for the patriarchal period.

[b] Or *seed*

[33] For an excellent commentary on "The Seed of Abraham," see David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person*, 37-41.

[a] Or *seed*

[a] Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

[34] For a more detailed study of Galatians 3:16, see Dallas Burdette, "Overview of Galatians" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist (accessed 19 March 2008) located under Biblical Studies and under New Testament and then under Overview of New Testament Books.

[35] For a more detailed study of the new heaven and the old earth, see Dallas Burdette, "New Heaven and New Earth" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 19 March 2008) located under Biblical Studies and then under New Testament and then under Revelation.

[36] "The church of the firstborn is in the Greek text ἐκκλησίᾳ πρωτοτόκων (ekklhsia prwtotokwn, "a church of firstborn [ones]).

[c] Haggai 2:6

[37] Don Preston, *The Last Days Identified* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Productions, 2004), 25.

[a] Or *not raise them up*

[a] Hosea 10:8

[38] The "seven last plagues" are reminiscent of God's punishment against the children of Jacob, which Moses sets forth in the Book of Leviticus (chapter 26), which is equivalent to Deuteronomy 32. Moses speaks of punishing the nation for disobedience this way: "I will punish you for your sins seven times over" (**Leviticus 26:18, 21, 24, 25, 27-39**). "Seven plagues" are equivalent to "seven times over."

New Heaven and New Earth

Thrust Statement: **The new heavens and the new earth represent the new Jerusalem, which is the Church.**

Scripture Reading: **Revelation 21:1**

Almost two thousand years ago, John, author of the Book of Revelation, writes: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea" (**Revelation 21:1**).[1] The question that confronts the interpreter is, what is the "first heaven and the first earth" that passed away? Again, one must inquire as to the meaning of the replacement of the old heaven and earth with "a new heaven and a new earth." As one seeks answers to the above questions, one cannot consult a dictionary as one seeks to unravel the mystery of what John saw. Only the context can determine—along with other books of the Old and New Testaments—the meaning one should attach to the phrase—"a new heaven and a new earth." [2]

Tim LaHaye, well-known Christian writer, gives various explanations in his commentary on Revelation, but he, himself, asserts that the "new heaven and a new earth" is "a refurbished earth to begin the millennium."[3] Another Christian writer, John F. Walvoord, seems to advance the notion that the new heaven and new earth follows the millennial kingdom.[4] He interprets this phrase literally, not figuratively. He says, "Most of the earth is now covered with water, but the new earth apparently will have no bodies of water except for the river mentioned in 22:2."[5] Another fellow believer, J. Vernon McGee, who is now with the Lord, postulated the idea that this new earth would be an earth in which the "law of gravity" would be revised.[6] He, too, speaks of "The chief characteristic of the new earth, as we have suggested, is the absence of the sea. This would automatically change the climate, the atmosphere, and the living conditions."[7] McGee also cites **2 Peter 3:7, 10-11** to bolster his conclusion of a literal earth—"In his second epistle Peter declares plainly that the present earth on which we live will be destroyed by fire."[8]

The views set forth in this essay do not agree with the interpretations advanced by the above authors. Nevertheless, one should never be caustic toward other Christians whose views differ from the status quo, that is to say, one's own denominational slant. No one in the Christian community sees everything clearly or exactly right. It goes almost without saying that every person is a creature of his or her own age. Very few individuals can lift themselves above their own ideas of their training or culture. As one approaches **Revelation 21:2** or **2 Peter 3: 10-13**, one must lay aside preconceived ideas and carefully reexamine long-held traditions. One must rethink and readjust one's hand-me-down interpretations concerning the Book of Revelation.

The object of any interpreter is to recover the original idea communicated to the original readers. The Book of Revelation is the unfolding of the victorious Christ and His Church over His enemies (**Revelation 1—11**) and the Church victorious over her enemies (**Revelation 12-22**). In this book, one witnesses the old world of Judaism passing away—"the first heaven and first earth had passed away" (**Revelation 21:1**). Israel's annihilation by the Romans in AD 70 is depicted in metaphoric words, which language is descriptive of Israel's covenant heaven and earth passing away with all its rituals (**2 Peter 3:10-13**). Matthew records the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus—forty years earlier—foretold the destruction of apostate Israel with apocalyptic language, a language with which the Jews were familiar: "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'" (**Matthew 24:29**).[c] Just as Isaiah describes the passing away of Babylon with apocalyptic language of the heavenly bodies, so, too, Jesus employs the same kind of imagery to express the passing away of the old world of Israel.

God created Israel by giving them a covenant, but, in AD 70, Israel's covenant heaven and earth passed away with the overthrow of Jerusalem along with its Temple and all of its regulations (**Hebrews 8:13**), which were shadows of things to come (**9:1-10; 10:1-4**). In the destruction of this Old Covenant heaven and earth, God gave a New Covenant, which represents the new heaven and earth that is also called, by John, the "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (**Revelation 21:2**). Paul's Epistle to the Galatians also refers to this "heavenly Jerusalem," which he describes as "our mother." Paul elaborates this concept as he draws an analogy between Hagar and Sara:

> [21] Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? [22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. [23] His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. [24] These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. [25] Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (**Galatians 4:21-6**)

Just as John spoke of the "the first heaven and the first earth" as having passed away (**Revelation 21:1**), so, also, Jesus himself tied the passing away of heaven and earth to the passing away of the Law of Moses—the Old Covenant world of Judaism. Listen to Jesus as He calls attention to Judaism—"the first heaven and the first earth":

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (**Matthew 5:17-18**)

"Until everything is accomplished" occurred in AD 70 with the annihilation of Jerusalem as had been foretold by the prophets (see **Luke 21:20-22, 32; Matthew 23:14-34**). This "heaven and earth" does not signify the physical universe, but rather it denotes the covenant world of Judaism (**Luke 21:32**). In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus informs His listeners that "not the smallest letter" or "the least stroke of a pen" will pass from the Law until two eschatological events transpire—(1) heaven and earth disappearing and (2) everything accomplished as foretold by the Law or the Prophets. "Heaven and earth" represent the Old Covenant system. Jesus explains, "Everything accomplished" as:

> When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. [21] Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. [22] For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. (**Luke 21:20-22**)

Shortly before Jesus' ascension to the Father, He explained the "fulfillment of all that has been written." Luke reports the following words of Jesus: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (**24:44**). In this remark, Jesus is speaking, not only about His death, burial, and resurrection, as foretold by the prophets, but also about the passing away of the whole Old Testament world of Judaism, which came to culmination in AD 70. In the development of one's apprehension of the "heaven and earth" passing away, one must reflect upon the Olivet discourse in which Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (**Matthew 24:35**). Upon one's first reading of this text, one might arrive at the conclusion that Jesus is speaking of the physical heavens and earth passing away. Yet, as one examines **Matthew 24** closely, one discovers that Jesus is not discussing the solar system, but rather, He is telling His disciples about the "heaven and earth" of the old Jewish order, a system that will cease to exist with the extinction of the Jewish state as a power—a political and religious power that came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Remember, Jesus, approximately three and one-half years earlier, in His Sermon on the Mount, as it is commonly called, referred to the passing away of "heaven and earth." Listen, as cited earlier, to the words of Jesus:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (**5:17-18**)

As far as this author, Dallas Burdette, has been able to discern, the destruction of heaven and earth in the New Testament writings never refer to the physical universe, but rather to the ultimate passing away of apostate Israel. Before this heaven and earth disappears, Jesus asserts that the Law will not pass away until "everything is accomplished" as found in the Law. When one peruses the Old Testament, one quickly observes the use of "heavens and earth" employed in prophetic language to designate the passing away of political powers. How do the prophets utilize the phrase "heavens and earth"? The Song of Moses, found in **Deuteronomy 32**, is an excellent example of poetic language with the use of the words "heaven" and "earth," which usage symbolizes Israel. Moses begins his prophecy concerning the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 with the following words: "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth" (**Deuteronomy 32:1**). In this Chapter, Moses speaks of Israel as "heaven" and "earth." Israel was exhorted to "listen" and to "hear." This song depicts the fate of Israel for not listening to the words of Moses: "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death[e] below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains" (**32:22**). The "earth" and the "foundations of the mountains" are metaphors for the nation of Israel.

At an earlier time, God had forewarned Israel about His judgment that they could expect for their flagrant disregard for His Law. Pay attention once more to the words of Moses: "The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand" (**28:49**). Paul and the author of Hebrews (**Romans 10:19; 12:19; Hebrews 10:30, 31**) cite this Song; this Song of Moses was being fulfilled in their day. **Deuteronomy 32** sets forth God's deliverance of Israel from their oppressors as well as God's punishment for their disobedience. Remember, this Song is a song of deliverance as well as a song of warning. Since the **Book of Revelation** is about the passing away of the old heavens and earth (apostate Jerusalem with its Temple and its ritual ceremonies) and the establishment of new heavens and a new earth (the Church, which is the Bride of Christ), one observes the saints singing the Song of Moses and also a song of the Lamb of God as victory over the Beast is gained:

> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God [3] and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages (**Revelation 15:2-3**).

A cursory reading of **Deuteronomy**, **Chapters 28** and **32**, reveals that Moses foretold the utter destruction of the nation of Israel. Jesus, in **Matthew 21-25** sets forth the time of the end for the fulfillment of what the prophets had previously forewarned.

If one wishes to comprehend the phrase "heaven and earth," one must approach the Old Testament, which is the background for the New Testament discernment. The symbolic language of **Deuteronomy 32** depicts the downfall of Judaism and the ultimate victory of God, which victory is depicted in **Revelation 15:2-3** as victory over the Beast. Isaiah also employs the symbolic use of heavens and earth in his rebuke against Israel. Sometimes it is difficult to detect the literal use of heavens and earth over against its symbolical use. In the example above (**Deuteronomy 32:1**), one sees the figurative use also in Isaiah as he addresses a rebellious nation: "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand"' (**Isaiah 1:2-3**). The "heavens" and "earth" are identified as "children" and "Israel."

This same scenario is put forth in God's response to Israel as He uses the symbolic terms "heaven" and "earth." At first glance, it appears that God speaks of the literal heaven and earth in **Isaiah 51:13**, which reads: "That you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?" What does heaven and earth refer to? Is He speaking of the literal heavens and earth? Or is He speaking of the nation of Israel as set forth in **1:2-3**. Perhaps, the answer is clarified in **51:16**: "I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand— I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, 'You are my people.'" The literal heavens and earth were set in place a few thousand years ago. The context indicates that God is talking about Zion; He is speaking of His people—the foundation of Israel as a nation. Heavens, in Scripture, frequently refers to governments or political powers. Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, uses "heaven and earth" to refer to the political power of the Jews:

> "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[c] 30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[d] is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (**Matthew 24:29-35**).

This "heaven and earth" no longer exist. A literal interpretation of this phrase does not make sense. The passing of the Law and the passing of the heaven and earth would occur together. Jesus states emphatically that the "heavenly bodies will be shaken" (**24:29**). This shaken and passing away occurred in AD 70 and refers to the downfall of Judaism, which is the "heaven and earth" passing away. This entire

chapter of **Matthew 24** details the passing away of Israel as a nation. With the passing away of this old heaven and earth, there will be a new heaven and a new earth—the New Israel of God, which is the Bride of Christ. Isaiah sets forth judgment and salvation in **Chapter 65**. After painting a rather dismal picture of judgment against Israel (**65:1-16**), he then describes salvation in the form of "new heavens and a new earth" (**65:17**). Isaiah reports God as saying: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (**65:17**).

The "new heavens and a new earth" represent the "heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" spoken of by the author of Hebrews (**Hebrews 12:22**). This new heavens and new earth is also referred to as "the church of the firstborn" (**12:23**). Following these comments, the author of Hebrews then describes the passing away of the world of Judaism. In its place, the author speaks of the kingdom of God foretold by Daniel (**Daniel 2:44**), a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Listen to the author of Hebrews as he seeks to capture the very essence of this heavenly Jerusalem and the passing away of the old heaven and earth:

> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. [25] See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? [26] At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."[c] [27] The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. [28] Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, [29] for our "God is a consuming fire."[d] (**12:22-29**)

The old "covenant" was shaken and replaced by that which could not be shaken, namely, the kingdom of God—the New Jerusalem (**Revelation 21:1-2**). It is in this equivalent attitude that the author of Hebrews writes: "by calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (**Hebrews 8:13**). It is difficult for Christians to cross over from the literal to the figurative. Yet, the figurative occurs with a great deal of frequency in both the Old and New Testament books. For example, Zechariah (520 BC) records a section concerning Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord (**Zechariah 3:1**). In this scenario, Satan accuses Joshua as standing before the Lord with "filthy clothes" (**3:4**). Following this accusation, the angel said to Joshua: "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you" (**3:4**). Joshua and his associates were symbolical of the coming of the Messiah. Zechariah writes:

"'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch (צֶמַח ,x#m^j)[9] See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes[c] on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. [10] In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty." (**Zechariah 3:8-10**)

One also sees symbolic language again in Isaiah **45:22** as God addresses Israel in her rebellion: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other." Israel is referred to as "earth." Earlier in this prophecy of Isaiah, God addresses both Jacob and Israel (**41:27**): "Be silent before me, you islands!" (**41:1**). David also uses "gates" and "doors" in a symbolic way in reference to people: " Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in" (**Psalm 24:7**). People are called gates and doors. Isaiah foretells about the coming of the Messianic age in which he describes in symbolic language the children of God as trees. Listen to him as he captures the imagination with highly figurative language:

And provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (**Isaiah 61:3**)

God's people are called "oaks of righteousness." Also, Jude, the Lord's brother, speaks of men who follow the ways of the world in all its sinfulness as "clouds without rain" and "wild waves of the sea" and "wandering stars" (**Jude 12-13**). "Clouds" and "wild waves" are figurative expressions that capture the imagination. Surely, no one interprets these metaphorical expressions as literal. Also, in the Book of Revelation, one observes "waters" as representative of people: "Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages (**Revelation 17:15**). Paul, as he writes to the Corinthians, calls attention to the apostasy of Israel and refers to Christ as a "rock." Pay attention to the symbolic language:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. [2] They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. [3] They all ate the same spiritual food [4] and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. (**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**)

Thus, the words *heaven* and *earth* are also used as symbolic language to depict nations or political powers. Because of traditional teaching, many Christians automatically interpret "heaven and earth" literally. The context is the deciding factor in seeking the proper application to this phrase. John reports in his introduction to the seven churches of Asia concerning "seven stars" in the right hand of Jesus and a "sharp double-edged sword" coming out of His mouth (**Revelation 1:16**). Also, John speaks of "seven golden lampstands" (**1:13**). Are "stars" literal? Is the "sword" literal? Are the "lampstands" literal? No! Jesus declares the figurative meaning of these two passages

when He reveals to John the interpretation of what he saw: "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels[b] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (**1:20**).

Just a perusal of the Old and New Testament writings reveal that the word *heaven* is used in a figurative sense to denote political powers or people. For example, prior to the brothers of Joseph selling their brother into slavery, Joseph reveals a dream in which the "sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down" to him (**Genesis 37:9**). When his brothers reported this dream of Joseph to Jacob their father, Jacob rebuked his son with stinging words. Moses records comments about Joseph telling of his dream and his father's rebuke: "When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you'" (**37:10**)? One cannot read this story without a consciousness of the symbolical nature of his dream—a dream with its "sun and moon and eleven stars" bowing before him, which eventually came true in the land of Egypt.

When Jesus speaks of the passing away of the "heaven and earth" in His Olivet Discourse, He referres to the passing away of the covenant world of Judaism (**Matthew 24:35**). Earlier, in this same chapter, Jesus introduces His comments about the Temple with all its rituals coming to an end. Listen to Jesus as He describes the disintegration of the old covenant world of Judaism:

> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. [2] "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." [3] As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (**24:1-3**)

The questions posed by the disciples concerns the fulfillment of Jesus' forecast (**24:2**)—"When will this happen, and what will be sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" The "end of the age" is the stumbling block for many Christians. Many associate this saying, based upon the KJV, with the end of time, not the "time of the end" of Judaism. The "end of the age" is also rendered "end of the world" in the King James Version. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The NIV translates the Greek as "age," not "world" as in the KJV. How does one determine which English word is correct? Jesus did not utilize the word *world*, but *age*.

One must find the answer to this troubling verse in the Greek text. Just a perusal of the Greek text reveals that the word *world* (κόσμος, kosmos) is not employed by the apostles, but rather the word *age* (αἰών, aiwn). What the apostles desired to know was when would the "completion of the age" (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, sunteleias tou aiwnos) actually occur (**24:3**). This age ended in AD 70 when the power of the holy people (Israel) would be "finally broken" (**Daniel 12:7**). Jesus cites the Book of Daniel in His Olivet Discourse in **Matthew 24:21**. The following charts sets forth the parallel between Daniel and Jesus:

Daniel 12:1	**Matthew 24:21**
At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of	For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.	

Jesus tells His disciples about the devastating effects of that "great and dreadful day of the Lord" (**Malachi 4:5**) spoken of by Malachi (433 BC). Malachi foretold of the coming of Elijah before "that great and dreadful day of the Lord." As Jesus seeks to convey this impending tragedy that **Malachi** (**4:1-5**) prophesied about and announced by John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:1-12**). This Elijah was none other than John the Baptist who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus discusses the role of John the Baptist and the prophecy of Malachi with His disciples. He says,

> This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'[c] [11] I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. [13] For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [14] And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. [15] He who has ears, let him hear. (**11:9-15**)

Later, Jesus in His Olivet Discourse paints a graphic picture of "that great and dreadful day of the Lord." In his description of this "coming wrath" spoken of by John the Baptist (**3:7-10**), Jesus chooses language that Isaiah employed in his description of the fall of political powers. Pay attention to Jesus as He captures the demise of Israel's clout and power and influence with powerful imagery of the destruction of the world of Judaism with its Temple and its rituals:

> Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[c] [30] "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. [31] And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. [32] "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. [33] Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[d] is near, right at the door. [34] I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. [35] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (**Matthew 24:29-35**)

What did "heaven and earth" passing away mean to His disciples? When would this occur? Jesus says, "this generation." How should one interpret the "sun," "moon," "stars," and the "shaken" of the heavenly bodies? One cannot and must not interpret this hyperbolic language in a way that Jesus did not intend for His words to be applied. This highly figurative language is the language of the downfall of governments or political powers. To illustrate this same scenario, one only has to observe the words of Isaiah as he describes the ultimate overthrown of the Babylonian Empire—a language

that Jesus also employs, as noted above, in His description of the overthrow of apostate Israel:

> See, the day of the LORD is coming —a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger— to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. [10] The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. [11] I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. [12] I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. [13] Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. (**Isaiah 13:9-13**)

Paul, about AD 68, wrote to the Corinthians about the passing away of the world of Judaism: "For this world in its present form (σχῆμα, schma, "fashion") is passing away" (**1 Corinthians 7:31**). This passing away came about in AD 70—twelve years after Paul wrote this letter. Again, Paul writes about apostate Israel with concise language as he depicts its demise: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages (τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, telh twn aiwnwn, "end of the ages") has come" (**10:11**). This passing away is the very thing that the author of Hebrews says, "By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (**Hebrews 8:13**). At the time of writing of First Corinthians and the Book of Hebrews, the old covenant world of Judaism had not yet disappeared. Again, this same author of Hebrews writes: "They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (**9:10**). The "new order" represents the kingdom of God prophesied by Daniel. The "new order" is the Gospel age. The old heaven and earth was about to disappear. George Eldon Ladd comments on **Hebrews 8:13** are informative and well worth citing. Within the context of his explanation, he cites the words of **Hebrews 10:16-18** concerning "forgiveness." He seeks to capture the essence of **Hebrews 8:13** with the following comments:

> The passage we have just cited from Hebrews says that when there is forgiveness, there is no longer any offering for sin. The forgiveness wrought by Christ renders invalid and obsolete the Mosaic system. Hebrews asserts the same truth in 8:13: "In speaking of a new covenant, he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Whether or not these words refer to the historical destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., they at least affirm the dissolution of the old Mosaic order, because the new order of redemptive reality has come. [9]

The Mosaic order represents the old heavens and earth. Even Josephus (AD 37—100) speaks of the Temple of Judaism as "like heaven," He writes:

> Now this partitionment of the tabernacle was withal an imitation of universal nature; for the third part of it, that within the four pillars, which was

> inaccessible to the priests, was like heaven devoted to God, while the twenty cubits' space, even as earth and sea are accessible to men, was in like manner assigned to the priests alone.[10]

The word *heaven* is a term that is employed throughout Scripture with a figurative connotation, not just a literal application. To develop this concept more clearly, the author of Hebrews (**12:26-28**) is cited once again in order to reinforce this concept. As cited above, the author writes:

> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."[c] 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

One can hardly read these words without a reflection upon the words of Jesus to His disciples concerning the overthrow of apostate Israel in His Olivet Discourse: "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'"[c] (**Matthew 24:29**). "Heavenly bodies will be shaken" is a forecast of Israel's destruction in AD 70. Remember, Isaiah (739 BC) also employs this kind of terminology as he describes the overthrow of ancient Babylon: "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger" (**Isaiah 13:13**). "Heavens treble" and "earth will shake" represent the utter devastation of Babylon. Haggai (520 BC) also describes the change that will occur with the coming of the Messiah. He writes: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land"' (**Haggai 2:6**). The author of Hebrews (**Hebrews 10:26-28**) cites from the prophet Haggai in order to prove that the events on the horizon were now approaching, which had its fulfillment in AD 70 (see **Daniel 12:7**).

When will this shaking of the heavens and the earth occur? Haggai again goes right to the heart of the matter when he writes: "'I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty" (**Haggai 2:7**). When God shakes all nations, the prophet says, "The desired of all nations will come." "The desired of all nations" is none other than the Messiah. This One ("the desired of all nations") is the same as "Shiloh" (שִׁילֹה, v!,l)h) of **Genesis 49:10**: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs[c] and the obedience of the nations is his." The "scepter" would not depart from Judah until Shiloh came, that is to say, until Jesus the Messiah appeared on the scene. The Scepter departed completely in the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70—Israel ceased to exist as a political power.

As one seeks to unravel the meaning of heaven and earth in the Scriptures, one recalls the words of Peter to God's elect who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia concerning the "a new heaven and a new

earth" (**2 Peter 3:10-13**). Listen to Peter as he calls attention to dissolution of the old Mosaic order and the institution of the new Messianic order:

> But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.[a] 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.[b] **That day** will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (**2 Peter 3:10-13**)

Upon first reading of this passage, especially out of context, one assumes that Peter is speaking of the literal destruction of heaven and earth. But a closer examination reveals that this heaven and earth had to do with the destruction of the nation of Israel, which annihilation occurred in AD 70. Prior to introducing this forecast about this extinction, he writes about his first correspondence (**3:1**). He then reminds them of words spoken of by the prophets and the Lord Jesus concerning the last days of Israel (**3:3**). He speaks of the "last days" with the following terms:

> First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (**3:3-7**)

The "last days" are the days that the prophets prophesied concerning last days of Israel. Peter, in his first Epistle, makes reference to the events he describes in this second Epistle. He states emphatically, "The end of all things is near" (**1 Peter 4:7**). He then speaks of God's judgment upon the house of Israel: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God" (**4:17**)? These statements sound very similar to the warnings of James:

> Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (**James 5:7-9**)

Milton S. Terry (1840-1918) comments upon the traditional exposition of the "new heaven and new earth," which one finds in the following Scriptures: **Isaiah 51:16; 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11; 21:1**. He denies the future restoration of the Jews to Palestine and the rebuilding of Jerusalem based upon these

Scriptures. He rejects the traditional interpretation placed upon **2 Peter 3** as having reference to a literal destruction of the heavens and earth. In a footnote dealing with these Scriptures, he writes with clarity concerning the true import of these often twisted passages:

> But the contexts of these several passages do not authorize such a doctrine. Isa. li, 16, refers to the resuscitation of Zion and Jerusalem, and is clearly metaphorical. The same is true of Isa. lxv, 17, and lxvi, 22, for the context in all these places confines the reference to Jerusalem and the people of God, and sets forth the same great prophetic conception of the Messianic future as the closing chapter of Ezekiel. The language of 2 Pet. iii, 10,12, is taken mainly from Isa xxx, 4, and is limited to the Parousia, like the language of Matt. xxiv, 29. The Lord made "not only the land but also the heaven" to tremble (Heb xii, 26), and removed the things that were shaken in order to establish a kingdom which cannot be moved (Heb. xii, 27, 28).[11]

Terry cites **Isaiah 65:17** and **66:22** as confirmation that the new heavens and a new earth refer to the Messianic future, which is the foundation of **2 Peter 3**. Isaiah writes:

Isaiah 65:17	**Isaiah 66:22**
Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.	"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.

Prior to Isaiah speaking of "new heavens and a new earth," he speaks of a new people who would seek Him: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (**65:1**). Paul cites this Scripture to the Christians in Rome to demonstrate that this prophecy had been fulfilled at the time of his writing Romans (AD 59): "And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me'"[1] (**Romans 10:20**). Before the new heavens and the new earth came into full bloom, Isaiah describes God's rejection of national Israel:

> All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations— 3 a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick; 4 who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat; 5 who say, 'Keep away; don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you!' Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day. 6 "See, it stands written before me: I will not keep silent but will pay back in full; I will pay it back into their laps— 7 both your sins and the sins of your fathers," says the LORD. "Because they burned

> sacrifices on the mountains and defied me on the hills, I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds." (**Isaiah 65:2-7**)

After this destruction, Isaiah then speaks of new heavens and a new earth. Again, when would this new heavens and new earth come into existence? Listen once more to Isaiah: "I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live" (**65:9**). Once more, God speaks of the covenant world of Israel: "You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse; the Sovereign LORD will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name" (**65:15**). After the dissolution of fleshly Israel, God then speaks of new heavens and a new earth (**65:17** and **66:22**). It is in this same fashion, following the destruction of apostate Jerusalem that John writes:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." [5] He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (**Revelation 21:1-5**)

Remember, Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, speaks of this dissolution of the world of Judaism: "I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (**Matthew 24:34**). It is in this same vein that John Owen (1616-1683) captures the proper use of heavens and earth, as set forth by Jesus, in his sermon on "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth." His observations are excellent, even though he applies the "shaking" of the heavens and earth to the Roman Empire within the west rather than to Judaism in the first century. In spite of the fact that there is misapplication concerning the shaking of the heavens and the earth, nevertheless, his comments are on target as he applies this phraseology to governments:

> The first was between the years 400 and 500 after Christ, when the Roman empire of the west—that which withheld the man of sin from acting his part to the life—was shivered to pieces by many barbarous nations; who, settling themselves in the fruitful soils of Europe, began to plant their heavens, and lay the foundations of their earth, growing up into civil states,--for the most part appointing them to be their kings in peace who had been their leaders in war (underscoring mine—RDB).[12]

John Owen, once more, in his sermon "The Shaking and Translation of Heaven and Earth," delivered to House of Commons on April 19, 1649, correctly identifies the various luminaries in the solar system as metaphors of political states in both the Old and New Testament writings. He declares:

Not to hold you too long upon what is so plain and evident, you may take it for a rule, that, in the denunciations of the judgments of God, through all the prophets, heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the like appearing beauties and glories of the aspectable heavens, are taken for governments, governors, dominions in political states; as Isa. xxiv. 12-15; Jer. xv. 9; li. 25.[13]

Again, the thoughts and insights of John Owen on **2 Peter 3** are worthy of citation. In his sermon on "Providential Changes, An Argument for Universal Holiness," he unfolds the true meaning of the new heavens and the new earth in **2 Peter 3**. His comments are extremely helpful in seeking to comprehend this most often misapplied Scripture. In the following comments, he sets forth an awareness that the old heavens and earth represent the old world of the Jewish political power that would be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth—the bride of Christ, an eternal kingdom. He writes with keen observation as he puts pen to paper about the skepticism of some who doubted the transition from the old world to the new world:

> It is evident, from sundry places in the New Testament, what extreme oppositions the believing Jews met withal, all the world over, from their own countrymen, with and among whom they lived. They in the meantime, no doubt, warned them of the wrath of Christ against them for their cursed unbelief and persecutions; particularly letting them know, that Christ would come in vengeance ere long, according as he had threatened, to the ruin of his enemies. And because the persecuting Jews, all the world over, upbraided the believers with the temple and the holy city, Jerusalem, their worship and service instituted of God, which they had defiled; they were given to know, that even all these things also should be destroyed, for their rejection of the Son of God. After some continuance of time, the threatening denounced being not yet accomplished,--as is the manner of profane persons and hardened sinners, Eccles. viii. 11,--they began to mock and scoff, as if they were all but the vain pretences, or loose, causeless fears of the Christians. That this was the state with them, or shortly would be, the apostle declares in this chapter, verses 3, 4. Because things continued in the old state, without alteration, and judgment was not speedily executed, they scoffed at all the threats about the coming of the Lord that had been denounced against them.[14]

Did the early Christians recognize the depth of what Peter wrote? Some had reservations about this "coming" in judgment upon the nation of Israel (**2 Peter 3:3-4**). Surely, the early Christians must have related the "coming wrath" of God to those to whom they proclaimed the Good News of God's salvation in and through Christ. Even John the Immerser called attention to the impending judgment upon Israel in his comments to the religious leaders of Israel: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath (**Matthew 3: 7**)? This "coming wrath" is quite evident from the Gospels as well as the Epistles found in the New Testament writings. Jesus forewarned His disciples as well as the religious leaders about the impending destruction of their holy city—the old heaven and the old earth. **Matthew 24**, **Luke 21**, and **Mark 13** are three separate accounts of the same events—destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Yet, Peter, toward the end of his life (65/68—he was martyred during the reign of Nero), put across the finality of the events promised by Christ and the prophets

of old. He did this with metaphorical language that the Jews were quite familiar with as found in the Old Testament. Peter introduces the believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (**1 Peter 1:1**) to the events previously related by Jesus in His Olivet Discourse (**Matthew 24-25**).

The scoffers (**2 Peter 3:3-4**), in their denial of His coming, failed to reflect upon the world of Noah's day—a world that was destroyed by water. What was destroyed? Was it the physical world of the solar system? Or was it the people of Noah's day? It is with the same sense that Peter speaks of the "present heavens and earth" as being reserved for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men (**3:7**). As one peruses the context of **2 Peter 3**, one is immediately conscious that Peter presents the "present heavens and earth" as the world of Judaism with its Temple and its religious ceremonies and its political powers. It is in this matching frame of mind that Paul writes, as cited above, to the Corinthians as he, too, addresses the last days of Israel's covenant world. One should observe Paul's reference to the "time is short" and "this world in its present form is passing away":

> What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; [30] those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; [31] those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. (**1 Corinthians 7:29-31**)

Shortly after Paul's comments about the last days, he again focuses upon the end of this world of the Jews. At the time of the writing of this First Epistle by Paul to the Corinthians (AD 58), he says that the "the fulfillment of the age has come" (**10:11**), that is to say, the end of the Old Covenant Jewish system and age. The Greek text reads: "the ends of the ages have arrived" (τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων κατήντηκεν, ta telh twn aiwnwn kathnthken). Paul says, "this world in its present form is passing away," but, on the other hand, Peter expresses it this way: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.[a] (**2 Peter 3:10**). Once more, John Owen's observations are exceptionally valuable in comprehending the force of Peter's words:

> I shall only observe, by the way, not to look into the difficulties of these verses, that I be not too long detained from my principal intendment,—that the apostle makes a distribution of the world into heaven and earth, and saith, they "were destroyed with water, and perished." We know that neither the fabric or substance of the one or other was destroyed, but only men that lived on the earth; and the apostle tells us, verse 5, of *the heavens and earth that were then*, and were destroyed by water, distinct from the heavens and were destroyed by water, distinct from *the heavens and the earth that were now*, and were to be consumed by fire: and yet, as to the visible fabric of heaven and earth, they were the same both before the flood and in the apostle's time, and continue so to this day; when yet it is certain that the heavens and earth whereof he speaks were to be destroyed and consumed by fire in that generation. We must, then, for the clearing our foundation a little,

consider what the apostle intends by "the heavens and the earth" in these two places.[15]

In this paragraph, Owen calls attention to the metaphorical, or figurative, use of the words *heaven* and *earth* to denote the inhabitants, not the literal solar system. Just as the world ("men that lived on the earth") in Noah's day was destroyed, so, in Peter's own generation, the world (Judaism with its Temple and its rituals and its government of political power) will "melt in the heat." It is also in this identical frame of mind that Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, addresses the ruin of Jerusalem with figurative, or apocalyptic, language to portray the downfall of the old heavens and earth of Judaism:

> So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 29 "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[c] 30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[d] is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (**Matthew 24:26-35**)

Jesus gives a picture of the fall of Jerusalem with very graphic apocalyptic language about the luminaries in the solar system: "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'"[c] (**24:29**); yet, on the other hand, Peter, too, captures the utter desolation of this system that God had previously ordained to be in force until the Messiah should come and until the complete fulfillment of all that the prophets had foretold, which promise included the absolute obliteration of the political power of Judah. Peter, in response to his critics, writes about the "day of the Lord," a day of judgment against apostate Israel:

> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.[a] 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.[b] That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping

with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (**2 Peter 3:10-13**)

Before analyzing the word *elements* (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) as employed by Peter in **verse 10**, this author, Dallas Burdette, believes that the commentary on these verses by Owen are well worth citing. Owen continues to develop his thoughts about the new heavens and the new earth with the following two comments, which comments clears away the underbrush of tradition—the tradition that the new heavens and new earth represent a refurbishing of the literal solar system:

1. It is certain, that what the apostle intends by the "world," with its heavens and earth, verses 5, 6, which was destroyed by water; the same, or somewhat of that kind, he intends by "the heavens and the earth" that were to be consumed and destroyed by fire, verse 7. Otherwise there would be no coherence in the apostle's discourse, nor any kind of argument, but a mere fallacy of words.
2. It is certain, that by the flood, the world, or the fabric of heaven and earth, was not destroyed, but only the inhabitants of the world; and therefore the destruction intimated to succeed by fire, is not of the substance of the heavens and the earth, which shall not be consumed until the last day, but of persons or men living in the world.
3. Then we must consider in what sense men living in the world are said to be the "world," and the "heavens and earth" of it. I shall only insist on one instance to this purpose, among many that may be produced, Isa. li. 15, 16. The time when the work here mentioned, of planting the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God, was when he "divided the sea," verse 15, and gave the law, verse 16, and said to Zion, "Thou are my people;"—that is, when he took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state. Then he planted the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth,--made the new world; that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein before they were. This is the planting of the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth in the world. And hence it is, that when mention is made of the destruction of a state and government, it is in that language that seems to set forth the end of the world. So Isa. xxiv. 4; which is yet but the destruction of the state of Edom. The like also is affirmed of the Roman empire, Rev. vi. 14; which the Jews constantly affirm to be intended by Edom in the prophets. And in our Saviour Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, Matt. xxiv., he sets it out by the expression of the same importance. It is evident, then, that, in the prophetical idiom and manner of speech, by "heaven" and 'earth," the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them, are often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood.
4. On this foundation I affirm, that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction

> of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state; for which I shall offer these two reasons of many that might be insisted on from the text.[16]

Before enumerating his two reasons for the above statements (four), it is necessary to make a comment about one of his statements in number 3. He identified **Revelation 6:14** with the Roman Empire, but in this interpretation, he is incorrect, so it seems to me. **Revelation 6:14** is found within the sixth seal. This seal is about the downfall of apostate Israel, not the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, the reformers identified the beast of Revelation and its number 666 as referring to the Roman Catholic Church. Since Owen lived during the 1600s, he, too, saw the Catholic Church as the beast in the Book of Revelation. Even though he was mistaken on this point, nevertheless, he was still on target in identifying the old heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth as related to people, not the solar system. In fact, the language in **Revelation 6:14** is very similar to the language of Jesus about the destruction of Jerusalem in **Matthew 24**. Observe the similarity of apocalyptic language in the Revelation text by John:

> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! (**Revelation 6:12-16**)

This is a description of the last days of Israel, not the end of the solar system. If this text depicts the end of the solar system, the following question arises: what good would it do individuals to call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb? This language is similar to the language found in the Old Testament that speaks of the downfall of other nations, which will be taken up in more detail later in this essay. For the time being, the following chart is a parallel of the apocalyptic statements concerning the last days of Israel as found in both the **Gospel of Matthew** and the **Book of Revelation**:

Matthew 24:29	**Revelation 6:12-14**
Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.	The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling

	up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place

Even though the citations by John Owen are lengthy, they are, nevertheless, extremely helpful in grasping the totality of Peter's graphic description of the fall of Jerusalem and the coming of the new heaven and new earth that John sees in the final stages of Jesus' revelation to John about the last days of Israel and the completion of the New Covenant, which is described as new heavens and a new earth. Listen to John as he writes about the victorious church (new heaven and new earth) over Israel (first heaven and first earth):

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (**Revelation 21:1-2**)

In Owen's statement four, listed above, he sets forth two reasons as to why he considered the elements (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) melting with fervent heat as representing the Jewish system. He asserts:

> 1. Because whatever is here mentioned was to have its peculiar influence on the men of that generation. He speaks of that wherein both the profane scoffers and those scoffed at were concerned, and that of Jews;—some of them believing, others opposing the faith. Now, there was no particular concernment of that generation in that sin, nor in that scoffing, as to the day of judgment in general; but there was a peculiar relief for the one and a peculiar dread for the other at hand, in the destruction of the Jewish nation; and, besides, an ample testimony, both to the one and the other, of the power and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ;—which was the thing in question between them.
> 2. Peter tells them, that, after the destruction and judgment that he speaks of, verse 13, "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth," etc. They had this expectation. But what is that promise? Where may we find it? Why, we have it in the very words and letter, Isa. lxv. 17. Now, when shall this be that God will create these "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?" Saith Peter, "It shall be after the coming of the Lord, after that judgment and destruction of ungodly men, who obey not the gospel, that I foretell." But now it is evident, from this place of Isaiah, with chap. lxvi. 21, 22, that this is a prophecy of gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens is nothing but the creation of gospel ordinances, to endure for ever. The same thing is so expressed, Heb. xii. 26-28.[17]

In Owen's concluding remarks, he seeks to summarize all of his previous statements with the following summary:

> There is the foundation of the apostle's inference and exhortation, Τούτων οὕτως πάντων λυομένων (toutwn Joutws pantwn luomenwn, "these things

thus all being dissolved"--RDB).—"Seeing that I have evinced that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved,—that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned,—in a way of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword,—let others mock at the threats of Christ's coming,—he will come, he will not tarry; and then the heavens and earth that God himself planted,—the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church,—the whole old world of worship and worshippers, that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ,—shall be the end of these things, and that shortly."[18]

Hopefully, the reader will tolerate one more lengthy quote from Owen, a citation that is to the point in identifying the meaning of the "coming" of Christ Himself:

> Because in every such providential alteration or dissolution of things on the account of Christ and his church, there is a peculiar coming of Christ himself. He cometh into the world for the work he hath to do; he cometh among his own to fulfill his pleasure among them. Hence such works are called "his coming;" and "the coming of his day." Thus James exhorts these very Jews to whom Peter here writes, with reference to the same things, James v. 7-9, "Be patient unto the coming of the Lord." But how could that generation extend their patience to the day of judgment? "Nay," saith he, "that is not the work I design, but his coming to take vengeance on his stubborn adversaries;" which he saith, verse 8, "'draweth nigh,' is even, at hand; yea, Christ, 'the judge, standeth before the door,'" verse 9, "ready to enter;"—which also he did within a few years. So upon or in the destruction of Jerusalem (the same work), Luke xxi. 27, the Son of man is said to "come in a cloud, with power and great glory;"—and they that escape in that desolation are said to "stand before the Son of man," verse. 36. So, in the ruin and destruction of the Roman empire, on the account of their persecution, it is said that "the day of the wrath of the Lamb was come," Rev. vi. 16, 17.[19]

When Peter writes about the "elements" (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) being "destroyed by fire," he employed apocalyptic language to depict the world of Judaism with its rules and regulations, not the literal disintegration of the physical heavens and earth. The KJV translates this part of the verse: "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (**2 Peter 3:10**). The heavens melting with "fervent heat" represents Israel. It is in this similar outlook of expression that the psalmist says, "Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts" (**Psalm 46:6**). "The earth melts" is a figurative way of expressing the falling of a kingdom. Both employ apocalyptic language to capture the intensity of one's rebellion against God. Again, Asaph writes about God's judgment in poetic style: "Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages" (**Psalm 50:3**). Another Psalm is equally forceful in apocalyptic language concerning God's wrath against His foes:

Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. [4] His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. [5] The **mountains melt** like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. [6] The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. (**Psalm 97:3-6**)

Once more, Asaph composes a psalm in which he describes God's anger against the Israelites' complaints against Him after bringing them out of the land of bondage (Egypt): "When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, [22] for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance" (**Psalm 78:21-22**). Isaiah, in his remarks about "obstinate children," writes with metaphorical language, which language Peter adopts in his pictorial description of Israel's demise:

See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. [28] His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray. [29] And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. [30] The LORD will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. [31] The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria; with his scepter he will strike them down. [32] Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm. [33] Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze. (**Isaiah 30:27-33**)

The Christians to whom Peter wrote understood the use of apocalyptic language and its application of judgment against nations. Peter's words must be interpreted within the biblical context of their historical setting. The word *elements* (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) in **2 Peter 3:10** is also employed by Paul to the Colossians (AD 62) as he writes about the rudiments of Judaism—the old Jewish religion. Paul in this Epistle warns the Colossians about human regulations. In **Colossians 2:8**, he writes: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) of this world rather than on Christ." The KJV translates the Greek word as "rudiments." Following this admonition, Paul labors the point about Judaism with all of its rituals (**2:14-17**). In fact, he says in **verse 16**, **Chapter 2**: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day." Then in **2:20**, he again uses the word *principles* (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) as he seeks to change behavior. Listen another time to Paul: "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules" (**2:20**).

One also observes Paul's discussion of these same rules and regulations to the churches located in the province of Galatia. He speaks of their life before conversion as a life under bondage (slavery) to the basic principles of the world, which principles enveloped the Mosaic Code. Keep your mind on Paul as he zeros in on the problem:

> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) of the world. [4] But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, [5] to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. [6] Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*,[a] Father." [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (**Galatians 4:3-7**)

Paul employs the Greek word στοιχεῖα (stoiceia) twice in this fourth chapter (**4:3; 4:9**). In this second occurrence, he asked the following question: "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia)" (**4:9**)? He follows this question up with another question: "Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again" (**4:9**)? What is he writing about? Hear once more as Paul explains: "You are observing special days and months and seasons and years" (**4:10**)!

From the above Scriptures (**Colossians 2:8, 20** and **Galatians 4:3, 9**), one sees more clearly the employment of the word στοιχεῖα (stoiceia) in **2 Peter 3:10**. The average reader will read **3:10** with wooden literalness concerning the physical heavens and earth. The word *fire* also throws off many interpreters in their analysis of this most often misapplied Scripture. Peter writes down: " But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire (καυσούμενα λυθήσεται, kausoumena luqhsetai, "burning will be dissolved"), and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.[a]" The word *fire* is not necessarily interpreted literally in every text. For instance, Jesus speaks to a crowd of many thousands when he says, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! [50] But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! [51] Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division" (**Luke 12:49-51**). Jeremiah, too, uses figurative language as he describes God's anger against Israel: "In fierce anger he has cut off every horn[f] of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it" (**Lamentations 2:3**).

After the dissolution of the old heavens and old earth, Peter puts in writing: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (**2 Peter 3:13**). In "keeping with his promise" calls to mind the words of Isaiah concerning the promise of new heavens and a new earth. These two Scriptures are cited again, even though listed above:

Isaiah 65:17	**Isaiah 66:22**
Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.	As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.

These two Scriptures are the only two places in the Old Testament that this promise is made and neither of these Scripture citations speaks of literal heavens and earth. Charles Spurgeon (1832-1892) comments are informative concerning these two Scriptures. On July 5, 1891, Charles Spurgeon delivered a sermon on "God Rejoicing in the New Creation"; he took his text from **Isaiah 65:17-18**. Even though Spurgeon advanced the notion of something yet to come in his own day, or beyond, nevertheless, his comments about "the old heavens and earth" are significant, which he associated with Jewish rituals and which the Jewish believers understood as "the old heavens and earth." The new heavens and the new earth (the kingdom of God prophesied by **Daniel 2:44**) replaced the old heavens and the old earth (the world of Judaism):

> Did you ever regret the absence of the burnt-offering, or the red heifer, or any one of the sacrifices and rites of the Jews? Did you ever pine for the feast of tabernacles, or the dedication? No, because, though those were like the old heavens and earth to the Jewish believers, they have passed away, and we now live under new heavens and a new earth, so far as the dispensation of divine teaching is concerned. The substance is come, and the shadow has gone; and we do not remember it.[20]

Edward J Young's comments on **Isaiah 65:17** are also informative and on target as to the thrust of Isaiah's words concerning the new heavens and a new earth as figurative expressions to denote renovation:

Again God creates heaven and earth, and they are new. In that they are new, they will so fully show forth the glory of God their creator, and so completely fulfill every need and desire of man the creature, that the former heavens and earth will no longer be remembered, nor will they even enter upon the heart of man.

> Strictly speaking, the words former things refer to former heaven and earth. But heaven and earth are employed as figures to indicate a complete renovation or revolution in the existing course of affairs. With the advent of the Messiah the blessing to be revealed will in every sense be so great that it can be described only as the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The reference, however, is not to be restricted to the first advent but includes the entire reign of Christ, including the second advent and the eternal state. Christ renews the world, and Hebrews speaks of it as the world to come (2:5). In the passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15, Paul shows how the new creation applies to believers; and Peter sets forth the hope of believers to receive this new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:15). In the concept of the prophet, time and eternity, the age of the New Testament and the eternal heaven, are not sharply distinguished; and believers are already in the heavenlies. Prominent in the prophecies of blessing to come in the idea of forgetfulness of the past (cf. Rev. 21).[21]

To return to **Isaiah 65**, one perceives that Isaiah uses figurative language to describe the passing away of the old heaven and earth. This chapter sets forth invading armies under the following expression—fire and sword. The context of this verse (**17**) begins earlier with the overthrow of apostate Israel. God is very plain in His remarks

concerning the old heaven and earth (Israel) with the new heaven and earth (the church). Isaiah pens:

> You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse; the Sovereign LORD will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name. [16] Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes. [17] "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (**Isaiah 65:15-17**)

In **Chapter 66**, Isaiah speaks of judgment and hope. One observes the negative then the positive. God's execution of judgment upon the nation of Israel is quite revealing. Before God announces "the new heavens and the new earth (**66:22**), he details a graphic scenario of judgment against Israel:

> See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. [16] For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD. (**66:15-16**)

After God's announcement of judgment, He then proceeds to give hope to the nation with the proclamation of new heavens and a new earth: "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. Young's commentary on **Isaiah 66:22** clarifies still further the employment of new heavens and a new earth in context:

With this verse the prophet makes known the foundation for the entire preceding line of thought. By your seed and your name he has in mind the spiritual Israel of which he has been speaking. Seed refers to the descendants of the people of God, who form the subject of this address. Their perpetuity is to be assured. Name indicates reputation; forever the Church will be recognized as the people whom God has chosen to be His own. To assure God's people of this perpetuity and constant recognition, God institutes a comparison with the new heavens and the new earth. As God originally created the heavens and the earth, so now He is going to make (the participle suggests near futurity) new heavens and a new earth, which will stand before Him (i.e. under His constant care and protection: cf. 48:19; 53:2). The old Israel will pass away; but from it there will spring the remnant that has survived the judgment, and together with it will be a great influx of Gentiles, all of which will form the true Israel of God under the new dispensation. In the old dispensation this Israel of God (the Church) had been practically identical with the literal nation, but in the new the Gentiles "should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel, . . . to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God . . ." (Eph. 3: 6, 10). The promise is strengthened by saith the Lord.[22]

John Calvin (1509-1564), too, writes with insight as to the poetical nature of the new heavens and new earth. His comments are valuable of citation:

17. *For, lo, I will create new heavens and a new earth.* By these metaphors he promises a remarkable change of affairs; as if God had said that he has both the inclination and the power not only to restore his Church, but to restore it in such a manner that it shall appear to gain new life and to dwell in a new world. These are exaggerated modes of expression; but the greatness of such a blessing, which was to be manifested at the coming of Christ, could not be described in any other way. Nor does he mean only the first coming, but the whole reign, which must be extended as far as to the last coming, as we have already said in expounding other passages.[23]

John Lightfoot's (1602-1675) observations on the new heavens and the new earth are also discerning:

That the destruction of Jerusalem is very frequently expressed in Scripture as if it were the destruction of the whole world, Deut. xxii. 22; "A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell" (the discourse there is about the wrath of God consuming that people; see ver. 20, 21), "and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." Jer. iv. 23; "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light," &c. The discourse there also is concerning the destruction of that nation, Isa. lxv. 17; "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered," &c. And more passages of this sort among the prophets. According to this sense, Christ speaks in this place (Matthew 24:28-29--RDB); and Peter speaks in his Second Epistle, third chapter; and John, in the sixth of the Revelation; and Paul, 2 Cor. v.17,& c.[24]

Also, Lightfoot's comments on his "Exercitations upon St. John" also convey the same thoughts about the meaning of new heavens and a new earth as his previous comments on "Exercitations upon St. Matthew." In this section, he comments upon Peter's words concerning John's death. As one stands outside the Gospel of John, John lets his readers get a glimpse of Jesus' response to Peter concerning the death of John, which is quite revealing. Jesus says to Peter: "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (**John 21:22**). The phrase "Until I return" by Jesus deserves an explanation. This "until I return" refers to Christ's earlier words "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (**Matthew 16:28**). In Lightfoot's explanation of "until I return," he explains a number of Scriptures dealing with the "coming" of the "Son of Man coming in his kingdom," which coming deals with the new heavens and the new earth. Even though his remarks are very similar, nevertheless, the following observations are much fuller in his development of this misunderstood subject. Once more, his observations are worth citing:

I. That the destruction of Jerusalem and the whole Jewish state is described as if the whole frame of this world were to be dissolved. Nor is it strange, when God destroyed his habitation and city, places once so dear to him with so direful and sad an overthrow; his own people, whom he accounted of as much or more than the whole world beside, by so dreadful and amazing plagues. Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, "The sun shall be darkened, &c; which yet are

> said to fall out within that generation, ver. 34. 2 Pet. iii. 10, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," &c. Compare with this Deut. xxxii. 22, Heb. xii. 26: and observe that by *elements* are understood the Mosaic elements, Gal. iv. 9, Coloss. ii. 20: and you will not doubt that St. Peter speaks only of the conflagration of Jerusalem, the destruction of the nation, and the abolishing the dispensation of Moses.
>
> **III.** With the same reference it is, that the times and state of things immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem are called "a new creation,' 'new heavens,' and 'a new earth,' Isa. lxv. 17: "Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth." When should that be? Read the whole chapter; and you will find the Jews rejected and cut off; and from that time is that new creation of the evangelical world among the Gentiles.

Compare 2 Cor. v. 17 and Rev. xxi. 1, 2; where, the old Jerusalem being cut off and destroyed, a new one succeeds; and new heavens and a new earth are created.

> 2 Pet. iii.13: "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth." The heavens and the earth of the Jewish church and commonwealth must be all on fire, and the Mosaic elements burnt up: but we, according to the promise made to us by Isaiah the prophet, when all these are consumed, look for the new creation of the evangelical state.[25]

Since many Christians misinterpret the subject of the "new heavens" and the "new earth," the citations from earlier Christian commentators will shed more light on this misread subject. One other such scholar is John Brown (1784-1858). His remarks concerning **Matthew 5:18** are extremely informative concerning the meaning of the "until heaven and earth disappear." One should observe the negative (solar system) and the positive (Judaism) statements about this phrase:

> If the words, however, are carefully examined, they will be found to contain in them, not an indefinite declaration of the inviolable authority of the law, but a declaration of its inviolable authority till a certain period, till certain events had taken place,—"till heaven and earth passing away,' understood literally, is the dissolution of the present system of the universe; and the period when that is to take place, is called the "end of the world." But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament Scriptures knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic economy, and the establishment of the Christian, is often spoken of as the removing of the old earth and heaven, and the creation of a new earth and new heavens. For example—"For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." "For as the new heavens, and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain" (Isa 65:17; 66:22). The period of the close of the one dispensation, and the commencement of the other, is spoken of as "the last days," and "the end of the world"; and is described as such a shaking of the earth and heavens, as should lead to the removal of the things which were shaken (Haggai 2:6; Hebrews 12:26-27). The phrase in the end of the verse, "till all things be fulfilled," seems to refer to the typically

> prophetical character of the law, and to be equivalent to 'till all the things figured in it be—take place, really exist,—till the true priest, and the true altar, and the true sacrifice, come.'[26]

A proper grasp of **Matthew 5:18** and **2 Peter 3:10-13** clarifies the muddled thinking of so many Christians in the study of the **Book of Revelation**. Roderick Campbell's comments on **2 Peter 3** is filled with insight. Pay attention as he seeks to set forth the true interpretation of this often-misunderstood Scripture about the new heavens and the new earth:

> Peter is preparing his hearers for the "fiery trial" which he sees looming in the days ahead—a trial which is certain to test their faith. His hearers have not yet fully grasped the significance of the great change introduced by the advent of Christ. The external fabric of the Old Covenant still stands, in outward appearance seemingly as secure and glorious as it was before (except for the rending of the temple veil). Some of the Christians are still clinging tenaciously to the ancient symbolic rites and ceremonies. From our vantage point it is easy to accuse them of lack of vision. But we should bear in mind that Peter and his audience were living in the midst of a persecuting world. Moreover, the destruction of their sacred city and temple was then imminent. Peter had heard the doom of their magnificent temple pronounced by the lips of Jesus—a doom which, Jesus said, some of the generation then living would witness with their natural eyes. In the midst of that crumbling world, Peter calls to mind Isaiah's promise of "new heavens and a new earth." By the eye of faith, he sees this new creation emerging from the dust and debris of that once glorious order of things which was so dear to every loyal Hebrew heart (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7). He and his hearers are standing within the threshold of the new age, an age which, although potentially and actually present, has not yet been made fully manifest to his hearers, who are no doubt still, for the most part, babes in Christ.[27]

Another Scripture (**Matthew 28:20**), at first glance, is not usually associated with AD 70. But on closer examination, one discovers that Jesus emphasizes the consummation of the age of Judaism, which consummation inaugurates the Kingdom of God: "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, sunteleias tou aiwnos, "completion of the age")." Russell Stuart's (1816-1895) remarks about "the end of the word" as translated in the King James Version are also quite revealing. Listen to him as he unfolds the meaning of the Greek:

> 'Lo, I am with you always [all the days], even to the close of the age' (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, sunteleias tou aiwnos). Nothing can be more misleading to the English reader than the rendering 'the end of the world;' which inevitably suggests the close of human history, the end of time, and the destruction of the earth,—a meaning which the words will not bear. Lange, though far from apprehending the true significance of the phrase, rightly gives the sense, 'the consummation of the secular aeon, or the period of time which comes to an end with the *Parousia*.' What can be more evident than that the promise of Christ to be with His disciples to the close

> of the age, implies that they were to live to the close of the age? That great consummation was not far off; the Lord had often spoken of it, and always as an approaching event, one which some of them would live to see. It was the winding up of the Mosaic dispensation; the end of the long probation of the Theocratic nation; when the whole frame and fabric of the Jewish polity were to be swept away, and 'the kingdom of God to come with power.' This great event, our Lord had declared, was to fall within the limit of the existing generation. The 'close of the age' coincided with the Parousia, and the outward and visible sign by which it is distinguished in the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the *terminus* by which in the New Testament the field is bounded. To Israel it was 'the end,' 'the end of all things,' 'the passing away of heaven and earth,' the abrogation of the old order, the inauguration of the new.[28]

CONCLUSION

With the passing away of the old heaven and earth (Judaism), one witnesses the inauguration of the new heavens and earth—the new Israel of God based upon better promises. In concluding this subject, a few further comments about the new heavens and new earth in **2 Peter 3:10-13** are appropriate to wrap up this in-depth study. For instance, another citation from Stuart Russell (1816-1895) is appropriate to help clarify this much-misunderstood subject. His observations about the annihilation (shaking) of the heavens and earth are exceptionally advantageous in one's assessment of this most challenging study. He creates the following assessment of Christ's comments (**Matthew 24:35**) and the Hebrews writer's comments (**Hebrews 10:26-28**), which explanation also illuminates Peter's remarks:

> What, then, is the great catastrophe symbolically represented as the shaking of the earth and heavens? No doubt it is the overthrow and abolition of the Mosaic dispensation, or old covenant; the destruction of the Jewish church and state, together with all the institutions and ordinances connected therewith. There were 'heavenly things' belonging to that dispensation: the laws, and statutes, and ordinances, which were divine in their origin, and might be properly called the '*spiritualia*' of Judaism—these were the *heavens*, which were to be shaken and removed. There were also 'earthly things:' the literal Jerusalem, the material temple, the land of Canaan—these were the *earth*, which was in like manner to be shaken and removed. The symbols are, in fact, equivalent to those employed by our Lord when predicting the doom of Israel. 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days [the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem] shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the powers of the *heavens shall be shaken*' (Matt. xxiv. 20). Both passages refer to the same catastrophe and employ very similar figures; besides which we have the authority of our Lord for fixing the event and the period of which He speaks within the limits of the generation then in existence: that is to say, the reference can only be to the judgment of the Jewish nation and the abrogation of the Mosaic economy at the Parousia.[29]

One of the great tragedies within the Christian community is the practice of citing Scripture in isolation from its context. In addition to this practice, one discovers literal interpretations placed upon hyperbolic, or overstatement, language. Yet, this type language should never be interpreted literally. Hyperbolic language is employed in order to draw attention to the seriousness of the subject under discussion. The traditional reading of **2 Peter 3:10-13**, as discussed above, is one such example. Many sincere Christians have failed to examine the multitude of Scriptures that deal with the "last days" of the Jewish age. The events described by Peter in this text are frequently interpreted in a literalistic sense—the literal destruction of planet earth. Yet, many Christians read **Luke 3:5** without a wooden literalness. Luke writes about the mission of John the Baptist—the Elijah of Malachi: "Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth." This citation is from Isaiah **40:3-5**, but no one reads this as literal language. One observes that this is poetic, or lyrical, language to capture the imagination.

As stated above, **2 Peter 3:3** speaks of the impending catastrophe as the "last days" (ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, escatwn twn Jhmerwn, "last of the days"). Many were, no doubt, questioning Peter's remarks in his First Epistle (**1 Peter 4:7, 17**). "Where is this 'coming' he promised" (**2 Peter 3:4**)? Peter then declares, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief" (**3:10a**). Earlier, Jesus had spoken of this day of destruction, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (**Matthew 24:36**). Peter describes this destruction of Israel's theocracy in highly symbolic, or apocalyptic, language in order to capture the finality of the holy people: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (**2 Peter 3:10b**). One cannot read Peter's statement about the heavens without recalling Jesus' remarks about the "last days" of Israel theocracy in His Olivet Discourse:

> "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[c] 30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[d] is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (**Matthew 24:29-35**)

Remember, Peter states, "The elements (στοιχεῖα, stoiceia) will be destroyed by fire" (**2 Peter 3:10**). It is not uncommon for Christians to read this statement with a wooden literalness of the physical heavens. But is this what Peter is referring to? No! He employs poetic language, as Jesus also did, to describe the total disintegration of the Jewish system with its Temple and with its rules and with its regulations. The word

stoiceia signifies the "elements" of Judaism, that is to say, the old covenant world of the Jewish religion. His statements must be interpreted within the total biblical, covenantal, and historical setting. The new heaven and new earth of **2 Peter 3** represent the kingdom of God that both John the Baptist and Jesus announced during their ministries. Peter speaks of the very thing that John witnessed: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (**Revelation 21:2-2**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[2] One will observe repetition throughout this essay. Since this subject of "new heavens and a new earth" is so entrenched in the hearts of men and women from a literal fulfillment of a refurbished heaven and earth, it is necessary to go back and forth with Scripture citations in order to drive home the intent of the authors of Holy Scripture.

[3] Tim LaHaye, *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 307. This view is set forth as a result of his "futurist interpretation" of the book. He writes: "The futurist view, which seems to me to be the most satisfactory, accepts the book of Revelation as prophecy that primarily is yet to be fulfilled, particularly from chapter 4 on" (Ibid., 4).

[4] John f. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, 1976), 312.

[5] Ibid., 311.

[6] J. Vernon McGee, "Revelation," *Thru the Bible,* 5 volumes (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 5:1062.

[7] Ibid., 1063.

[8] Ibid.

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[e] Hebrew *to Sheol*

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[d] Or *he*

[e] Or *race*

[c] Haggai 2:6

[d] Deut. 4:24
[e] Or *facets*
[b] Or *messengers*
[c] Mal. 3:1
[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[d] Or *he*

[e] Or *race*

[9] George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 27.

[10] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* Books I--III, Loeb Classical Library, Vol., 242 translated by H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1930, 1998), 375. (underscoring is mine—RDB)

[c] Haggai 2:6

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[c] Or *until Shiloh comes*; or *until he comes to whom tribute belongs*

[a] Some manuscripts *be burned up*

[b] Or *as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come*

[11]Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1898], 1987), 489.

[l] Isaiah 65:1
[e] Or *race*

[12] John Owens, "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth," in *The Works of John Owen: Sermons to the Nation*, 23 vols. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, [1850-1853], 1999), 8:265.

[13] Ibid., 8:255.

[14] John Owens, "Providential Changes, An Argument for Universal Holiness," in *The Works of John Owen: Sermons to the Church*, 23 vols. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, [1850-1853], 1998), 9:132. All highlighting with underlining is mine

(RDB). Remember, this sermon by Owen was delivered in the seventeenth century (no date is assigned to the month or year in which this sermon was preached.)

[a] Some manuscripts *be burned up*

[15] John Owen, "Providential Changes, An Argument for Universal Holiness," *Sermons to the Church*, 9:133.

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[d] Or *he*

[e] Or *race*

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[a] Some manuscripts *be burned up*

[b] Or *as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come*

[16] John Owens, "Providential Changes, An Argument for Universal Holiness," in *The Works of John Owen: Sermons to the Church*,, 9:133, 134.

[17] Ibid., 9:134, 135.

[18] Ibid., 9:135.

[19] Ibid., 9:138, 139. Again, he incorrectly identifies the ruin and destruction as the Roman Empire, not the ruin and destruction of Jerusalem.

[a] Aramaic for *Father*

[a] Some manuscripts *be burned up*

[f] Or | *all the strength*; or *every king*; *horn* here symbolizes strength.

[20]Charles H. Spurgeon, "God Rejoicing in the New Creation," (July 5, 1891), *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 37* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1998, electronic ed. Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons, Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998). See also, Charles Spurgeon, "God Rejoicing in the New Creation," in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Year 1891, Volume 37—Sermons 2182-2236*, Original and Completely Unabridged (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications [1891], 1975, 1993), 354. I recommend this Sermon (349-360) to every believer. One cannot read this powerful message without an appreciation for what God accomplished for His people in and through Jesus. This message develops the necessity of holiness in one's life—a life that should manifest thankfulness for God's new creation in and through Jesus the Savior of the world. (underscoring is mine—RDB)

[21] Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972): 3: 513, 514.

[22] Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972): 2: 335-336.

[23] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Vol., 3, Calvin's Commentaries, 23 volumes, Vol., 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted 1979), 397-398.

[24] John Lightfoot, "Exercitations Upon the Gospel of St. Matthew," in *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica: Matthew—1 Corinthians*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker [1859], 1979), 2:318-319. Underlining is mine—R.D. Burdette.

[25] John Lightfoot, "Exercitations Upon the St. John," in *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica: Matthew*—John 4:22, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker [1859], 1979), 3:452, 453. Underlining is mine—R.D. Burdette.

[26] John Brown, "The Sermon on the Mount," in *Discourses and sayings of our Lord*, vols. 3 (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth [1850], 1990): 1:171-172.

[27] Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Philadelphia, PA: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1954), 115. Underlining is mine—R.D. Burdette.

[28] James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, [1878, 1887], 1996), 121.

[29] James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, [1878, 1887], 1996), 289-290. Underlining is mine—R. D. Burdette.

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[d] Or *he*

[e] Or *race*

The Revelation of Jesus to John

Chapter 1:1-3

Thrust Statement: **The prophecies in this book will occur soon.**

Scripture Reading: **Revelation 1:1-3**

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation is one of the most misunderstood of all the books of the New Testament. The futuristic approach to Revelation is one of the most prevalent views within the Christian community. This slant of understanding reads the prophecies of this book as linear action, that is to say, one continuous story beginning with **Chapter one** through **Chapter 22**. Those who interpret this book with this methodology read into this book the current events of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, there are those who explain Revelation as referring to the first century with emphasis upon the complete overthrow of the world of Judaism in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The futurist generally assigns a date for the book around AD 95, but those who believe the book is about the downfall of Judaism assign a date around AD 65.

Even though the book abounds with symbols, one can still understand this book with careful attention to the internal evidence and the symbols utilized by the prophets in the Old Testament. The internal evidence reveals the date of composition as having occurred during the reign of Nero, the sixth Emperor of the Roman Empire—Nero committed suicide on June 9, AD 68.[1] The way John helps his audience to grasp his message is through the context of the whole. The task of any interpreter is to discover the meaning the writer seeks to convey to his readers. If one wishes to decipher this book correctly, one must seek to grasp the intent of the author's purpose. In spite of the traditional way of interpreting this book, one must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditional understanding handed down from the Reformers from the fifteen-century onwards. Many Christians are so used to reading the Book of Revelation through the lenses of the futurist that they have just accepted what they have been taught by generations of interpreters, which makes it difficult to read the book accurately.

This study approaches the Book of Revelation as an enlargement upon Jesus' Olivet Discourse as reported by **Matthew** (**Chapter 24**), which Chapter describes the "last days" of Judaism. Briefly stated, the Book of Revelation, so it seems to this author, is divided into three major sections: (1) prologue [**Chapters 1—3]**, (2) the victorious Christ over His enemies [**Chapters 4-11**], and the triumphant Church over its foes (**Chapter 12-22**). The second and third sections cover the same period of time, but each section focuses upon different aspects of the overthrow of the Jewish world. **Chapter 4—11** covers the matching period of time that **Chapters 12-22** embraces. This second section focuses on the winning Christ and the third division is on the conquering Church. In this first apocalypse (**Chapters 4-11**), one witnesses the downfall of both the spiritual and the political world of Judaism with its Temple and all its rituals. One beholds the expansion of God's new kingdom over the old heavens and earth—the political power of the world of Judaism. Within this section, one views the opening of seven seals and the sounding of seven trumpets. As one reads the opening of the seven seals, one detects divine judgment upon the city of Jerusalem, a judgment expressed through symbols. On the other hand, the seven trumpets signal the time for God to inflict His punishment upon spiritual Sodom and Egypt (Jerusalem), figuratively speaking, where also Christ was crucified (**11:8**).

Following the letters to the seven churches located in Asia, one is introduced to the throne in heaven with its twenty-four elders (**Chapter 4**). As one reflects upon this scene, one witnesses the totality of spiritual Israel—twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles. In **Chapter 5**, the book with seven seals could not be opened by anyone in heaven or earth except by Christ the Lion of the tribe of Judah. These seven seals reveal the overthrow of the persecuting powers of the Jews as well as the abusive strength of Rome. In the **sixth Chapter**, one witnesses the opening of six of the seven seals—four of which represents the four horsemen of the apocalypse—(1) the white horse, (2) the red horse, (3) the black horse, and (4) the pale horse. An analysis of the four horsemen reveals that the first seal with its white horse and its rider represent the conquering Christ (**6:1-2**). The second seal with its red horse signaled the persecutor waging war against Christ (**6:4**). The black horse with its rider signifies distress, calamity, and famine, which is indicated by the symbols of the balances and scales for measuring food (**6:4-6**).

One cannot read about the fourth horse (pale horse) with its rider without reflection upon death and Hades (**6:7-8**). And then, the fifth seal reveals the souls under the altar requesting judgment upon their adversaries (**6:9-11**). The souls slain wanted to know when God would avenge their blood. In the third section (**Chapters 12-22**), John records God's answer and response to their inquiry in **Revelation 20:4**. And, finally, the sixth seal sets forth the shaking of the political powers of Judaism along with the utter destruction of Jerusalem (**6:12-17**), which is also set forth in **Matthew 24:29-35**. This sixth seal sets forth the very words of John the Baptist to the religious leaders as he questioned them: "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (**Matthew 3:7-12**). The following parallel illustrates the continuity between the two accounts:

Revelation 6:12-17	**Matthew 24:29-35**
12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun	29 "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened,

turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, [13] and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. [14] The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. [16] They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! [17] For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"	and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[c] [30] "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. [31] And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. [32] "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. [33] Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[d] is near, right at the door. [34] I tell you the truth, this generation[e] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. [35] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

In **Chapter 7**, one beholds the seventh seal opened with seven angels standing before God with seven trumpets. The angels prepared to sound the seven trumpets, which revealed that the time had come to bring about the utter overthrow of apostate Israel. In **Chapter 8** and **9**, the seven angels with their seven trumpets sounded the ultimate defeat and overthrow of Jerusalem, which John announced in the preceding six seals. Then in **Chapters 10** and **11**, one witnesses the culmination of all the events portrayed with the opening of the first seal to the last. With the coming of the new heavens and the new earth (**21:1-2**), one hears "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever" (**11:15**). The rider of the white horse had conquered Judaism, the enemy of Christianity. The Old Covenant Jewish system with its Temple and its rituals were no longer standing—Christ the Galilean had conquered.

PROLOGUE

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, [2] who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. [3] Blessed is the one who reads the words

of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.[2]

As one approaches an understanding of this unique book, one must be willing to lay aside one's rigid beliefs and carefully reexamine the text afresh. One must employ sound hermeneutical principles if one is to maintain a correct and responsible interpretation of this book of symbols, one should consult the Old Testament writings in order to draw correct conclusions as to the meaning of the many phrases or symbols in this book to the seven churches of Asia. John begins this book with the acknowledgement that this "revelation" (ἀποκάλυψις, apokaluyis) is a revelation from God through Jesus Christ.[3] The word apokaluyis is from two Greek words--ἀπό (apo, "away") and κάλυψις (kaluyis, "cover"). Thus, John is writing about the disclosure of what is about to be revealed from Jesus Christ. John employs the subjective genitive (Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Ihsou Cristou), that is to say, the One doing the revealing.[4] John writes under the direction of God. In this revelation from Jesus, God wants to show (δεῖξαι, deivxai) to His servants (τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, tois doulois autou) the things about to occur. The source of this revelation is God. The time frame of this revelation is set forth with finality: "what must soon take place" (**1:1**, NIV). The KJV renders this phrase: "things which must shortly come to pass." The Greek text reads "with speed" (ἐν τάχει, en tacei).

"With speed" must apply to the entire book. The prologue opens with the word *speed* (τάχος, tacos, "speed," "quickness,"). En tacei means "speedily, quickly, without delay; soon, shortly, before long." Tacei, when used with the proposition ἐν (en), is used as an adverb—speedily, quickly. The events revealed in this prophecy are about to happen suddenly (see also **1:19**). The epilogue (conclusion) of Revelation reinforces the imminence of the events foretold. Jesus concludes with a number of statements about the nearness of the events predicted in this prophecy. Listen to Jesus as he calls attention to events that are at the door: " The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place'" (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, Ja dei genesqai en tacei) [**Revelation 22:6**].

Immediately, Jesus repeats the closeness of the preceding events: "Behold, I am coming soon!" (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, ercomai tacu, "I am coming quickly") [**22:7**]. Then, once more, in **22:10**, John is told not to "seal up the words of the prophecy of this book." Why? The answer is found in the following words, "because the time is near" (ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν, Jo kairos gar engus estin, "for the time is near"). Again, in **22:12**, Jesus reinforces the nearness of the events, "Behold, I am coming soon!" (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, ercomai tacu, "I am coming quickly"). And, finally, Jesus brings to a close His prophecy with "Yes, I am coming soon" (ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, nai, ercomai tacu) [**22:20**]. Since Jesus repeated the immediacy of His coming five times in **Chapter 22** about God's judgment upon apostate Israel and His vindication of His Church, one cannot help but wonder why He reinforced the nearness of the "time of the end" five times?

To take the words "shortly" and "soon" to refer to the far-flung future of two thousand years is to read into the text one's own presuppositions. "Soon" can mean nothing but close by or near. The things set forth in visions and symbols were close at hand. These judgments were to begin with the people to whom this book was written, not thousand of years in the future. John writes: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is

written in it, because the time is near" (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, Jo gar kairos engus) (**1:3**). The ἐγγύς (engus, "near") of **1:3** echoes and reinforces the τάχει, (tacei, "shortly" or "speedily") of **1:1**. These events applied to them, not to aeons of time—two thousand years or more. The time was near for those who read and listened and took to heart the things written in this prophecy. In fact, this book was written to seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (**1:11**). This book describes the overthrow of apostate Jerusalem and the obliteration of the Jewish theocracy along with the demolition of the Temple with all of its ceremonies and rituals.

"What must soon take place" (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι, Jai dei genesqai) is reminiscent of Jesus' Olivet Discourse in **Matthew 24**. In **Matthew 24**, **Mark 13**, and **Luke 21**, Jesus sets forth the utter destruction of Jerusalem as foretold by the prophets. This discourse mentioned by the synoptic writers is but a miniature of the Book of Revelation. Just as Jesus reveals to John the destruction of Jerusalem so also Jesus makes known to His disciples in His Olivet Discourse the nearness of the catastrophic events about to occur within that generation (forty years)—the end of the Jewish age, or the last days of Judaism:

> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to
> him to call his attention to its buildings. [2] "Do you see all these things?" he
> asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every
> one will be thrown down." [3] As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the
> disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen,
> and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" [4] Jesus
> answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. [5] For many will come in my
> name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,[a]' and will deceive many. [6] You will hear of
> wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things
> must happen, but the end is still to come. (**Matthew 24:1-6**)

In **24:6**, Jesus says, "Such things must happen" (δεῖ γὰρ γενέσθαι, dei gar genesqai). About thirty-five years later (AD 65), Jesus gives a fuller revelation of the events about to transpire that He had spoken of earlier. Remember, in **1:1**, Jesus tells John about things that will occur with speed (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, Jai dei genesqai en taxei, "things that must happen with speed"). Both **Matthew 24** and the **Book of Revelation** reveal that the times spoken of by Daniel the prophet is about to be fulfilled; Daniel had spoken of these events over six hundred years earlier (see **Daniel 2:44; 9:24-27** and **Chapter 12**. When Daniel prophesied about the future events concerning the coming of Christ and His kingdom, the events predicted by him were not close by. Thus Michael, the great prince, told him: " But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (**Daniel 12:4**). Daniel was told to "close up and seal" until the "time of the end," not the end of time.

On the other hand, John was told: "Do not seal up (μὴ σφραγίσῃς, mh sfragishs, "seal not") the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near" (**Revelation 22:10**). The "time is near" for the punishment of apostate Jerusalem. This is very similar to **1:19**: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later (ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι, Jai mellei genesqai, "[the] things which (is) are about to occur"). This unfolding of events in the Book of Revelation is about to reach its climax, which events began as early as **Daniel 2**. Now, Jesus tells John not "to seal up" the things that Daniel was told to "close up and seal" until the "time of the

end." Why? Jesus explains: "the time is near." James, one of Jesus' brothers, writes: "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near [ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν, Jh Parousia tou kuriou, hngiken, "the presence of the Lord has drawn near"] (**James 5:8**). Peter also calls attention to those who questioned "the promise of his coming" (**2 Peter 3:4**). In **verse 3**, he states: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, ep escatwn twn Jhmerwn, "during the last of the days") scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires" (**3:3**). The author of Hebrews writes: " but in these last days (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν, ep escatou twn Jhmerwn) he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (**Hebrews 1:2**).

These "last days" of Israel were in their final stages. Forty years earlier, Jesus had warned about the "time of the end" for national Israel as the Covenant people of God:

> "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. (**Luke 21:21-22**)

Matthew also reports the words of Jesus this way: "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[b] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (**Matthew 25:15-16**). The "last days" in the Old Testament and the New Testament do not refer to the end of time, but to the end of the Old Testament age—the complete overthrow of Judaism in AD 70. Peter, too, writes about the completion of the ages: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (**1 Peter 4:7**). The judgment of Israel foretold by the prophets was at hand. It is in this regard that Peter writes: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God (**4:17**)? A casual reading of the third chapter of second Peter reveals that Peter is describing the passing of Israel with its Temple and all of its rituals.[5]

James, the Lord's brother, writes to Jewish Christians concerning the last days. Listen to him as he unfolds the impending events:

> Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (**James 5:7-9**)

James says that the "Lord's coming is near (ἡ παρουσία κυρίου ἤγγικεν, Jh Parousia kuriou hngiken, "The Lord's coming has drawn near)." It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Corinthians about the last days. Pay attention to Paul as he conveys the near approach of the fulfillment of what the prophets had earlier written: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (**1 Corinthians 10:11**). The Greek text reads: τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων κατήντηκεν (ta telh twn aiwnwn kathnthken), which reads in the English translation as: "the end of the ages has(ve) arrived. Earlier Paul describes the passing away of theocratic Israel: "Those who use the things of the

world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away" (παράγε γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμος τούτου, "For the fashion of this world is passing away") [**7:31**].

In the Olivet Discourse (**Matthew 24**), the apostles asked Jesus about the end of the age: "[3] As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, sunteleias tou aiwnos) [**Matthew 24:3**]. The KJV translates the Greek text as: "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world ?" The NIV correctly translates the Greek word αἰών (aiwn) as "age," not world, which is κόσμος (kosmos). The author of Hebrews pens the following words concerning that which is about to expire: "In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away" (**Hebrews 8:13**, KJV). The NIV translates: "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."

Toward the end of the **Book of Hebrews**, the author once more warns of the day of God's wrath against apostate Israel: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (**10:25**). The "Day approaching" is not a Sunday morning worship service, but the "coming wrath" addressed by John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:7**). The world of Judaism is about to pass away in its totality. Again, listen to the author as he focuses on end of Old Covenant world of Judaism:

> See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? [26] At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."[c] [27] The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. [28] Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, [29] for our "God is a consuming fire."[d] (**Hebrews 12:25-29**)

The "earth" and "heavens" represent the world of Judaism with its Temple and its rituals. Isaiah also addresses Judah and Jerusalem with the terms "heavens" and "earth" to the nation of Israel. Isaiah writes against this rebellious nation with metaphors:

> [2] Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. [3] The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." (**Isaiah 1:2-3**)

Chapter one of Isaiah is very negative in that it addresses the rejection of Israel and their ultimate end. But God does not leave them without a consciousness of events that will occur in the "last days" of Judah. He paints a graphic picture of the Messianic age during the final days of the world of Judaism:

> This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: [2] In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will

stream to it. [3] Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (**2:1-3**)

The author of Hebrews "last days" is the same as Isaiah's "last days" in **2:2**. The "last days" is not the Messianic age, but rather the "last days" of the political power of Judaism. As mentioned above, this shaking "once more" would occur during the last days of Israel, which ended in AD 70. The Book of Hebrews depicts the downfall of Israel, which is described in symbolic language in the **Book of Revelation** and **Matthew 24**, **Mark 13**, and **Luke 21**. The author of Hebrews begins his book with a reference to the "last days" of Judaism: " In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but in these last days (ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν, ep escatou twn Jhmerwn) he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (**2:1-2**). Daniel, too, spoke of the events that would occur in the "last days" of Israel as he interpreted a dream of Nebuchadnezzar: "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these" (**2:28**).

One can hardly reflect upon Daniel's phrase, "What things must take place in the latter days" (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, Ja dei genesqai ep escatwn twn Jhmerwn LXX) without a reminiscence of **Revelation 1:1**: "what things must take place quickly" (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἔν τάχει, Ja dei genesqai en tacei). This parallelism between Daniel and John provides insight into the Book of Revelation as well as the Book of Daniel. In this second chapter, Daniel predicts the coming of God's kingdom, a kingdom that will never be destroyed: "In the time of those kings (the Caesars, RDB),[6] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. In **Revelation 1:9**, John states that he is in the kingdom, which kingdom Jesus proclaimed. Mark reports this unique proclamation of the Messiah: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (**Mark 1:15**). The KJV renders this verse: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

"The time has been fulfilled" (πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρός, peplhrwtai Jo kairos) is the fulfillment of what the prophets prophesied about the coming of God's kingdom during the final days of Israel's demise, or destruction. Again, He says that the "kingdom of God has drawn near" (ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, Jhngiken Jh basileia tou qeou). **Revelation 1:1** is an echo of **Daniel 2:28**. Daniel, as he closes his revelation, writes about the "time of the end" (**12:4**), which concerns the end of national Israel. In this same chapter he pens:

> The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time.[b] When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." (**12:7**)

Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, addresses the remarks of some of His disciples about the Temple and the beautiful stones that adorned this House of God: "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every

one of them will be thrown down" (**Luke 21:6**). Following his interchange with them concerning their inquiry, He calls attention to prophesy concerning these events:

> When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. [21] Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. [22] For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. [23] How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. [24] They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (**Luke 21:20-24**)

"The "time, times and half a time" spoken of by Daniel is the time that Jerusalem would "be trampled on by the Gentiles." John also speaks of this time when he writes:

> I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. [2] But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. [3] And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. (**Revelation 11:1-3**)

To turn again to the Olivet Discourse as reported by Luke, Jesus, once more, narrows the events about to transpire concerning the kingdom of heaven:

> [29] He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. [30] When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. [31] Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [32] "I tell you the truth, this generation[a] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

CONCLUSION

Revelation 1:1-3 announces the imminent fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and His kingdom announced by Daniel the prophet of God as well as other prophets. John's Ἐν τάχει (en taxei, "with speed" or "quickly") is a substitute for Daniel's ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν (ep escatwn twn Jhmerwn, "in the latter days") [**Daniel 2:28**]. Within this frame of reference (**Revelation 1:1-3**), John conveys the very purpose of this book. The "latter days" spoken of by Daniel were now being fulfilled in John's day. For "the time is near" in verse three is an expression of imminence—"the things about to occur" (ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι, "the things which (is) are about to occur" [**1:19**].

[1] For an examination of this much-debated date of Revelation, see Dallas Burdette, "Date of Revelation: [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 21 January 2006] located under caption Biblical Studies and then under New Testament and then under the subheading Revelation.

[c] Isaiah 13:10; 34:4

[d] Or *he*

[e] Or *race*

[2] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[3] In the Greek New Testament, one finds the title of this book listed as Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου (Apokaluyis Iwannou, "Revelation of John"), but this caption is actually separate from the text itself. The Book of Revelation is a revelation of Jesus Christ. Frequently, one reads of the Apocalypse of Jesus rather than the Revelation of Jesus. The word *Apocalypse* is a transliteration of the Greek word Ἀποκάλυψις (Apokaluyis). Thus, scholars often write about "apocalyptic" language.

[4] For a detailed study of the objective and subjective use of "Jesus Christ," see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* in Kenneth Barker, General Editor, *An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 51-52.

[a] Or *Messiah*; also in verse 23
[b] Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11

[5] For a detailed study of **2 Peter 3**, see a forthcoming essay on "The New Heavens and the New Earth" by Dallas Burdette.

[c] Haggai 2:6

[d] Deut. 4:24

[6] Some may object to the Caesars beings called "kings," but John, author of Revelation, reports that the Jews, in response to Pilate's question ("Shall I crucify your king?" 19:15), cried out in their demand for Christ's crucifixion said: "'Take him away! We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered" (**John 19:15**).

[b] Or *a year, two years and half a year*
[a] Or *race*. The NIV translation of "race" for the Greek word γενεά (genea) is not accurate.

Overview of the Book of Romans

Thrust Statement: **The theme of the Book of Romans is justification by faith alone.**

INTRODUCTION

This exposition of the **Book of Romans** is not a verse-by-verse commentary, but rather it zeros in on the overall theme of the Book in order to draw attention to God's plan of salvation for a lost humanity. Before one attempts a detailed study of this Book, one needs a brief overview of the book's central focus. As one approaches the **Book of Romans**, one quickly observes that Paul develops the concept of justification through faith in Jesus, not works. Paul begins with the Gospel (**1:1—11:36**) and concludes with his exhortation to Christian living (**12:1—15:22**), along with his final words of encouragement and greetings (**15:23—16.27**). Yet in **chapter 16,** one discerns that this section is also a hall of fame for women. One cannot read this letter without a consciousness that the major theme of this discourse is about God's Gospel, that is to say, God's plan of salvation made available to all humanity "in" and "through" Jesus Christ by faith (**1:16-17**). This volume is about God's righteousness and how it is imputed to humanity. God's wisdom is that He has made His righteousness available to all who will put their trust in Jesus.

After setting forth God's means of justification, Paul surveys the condition, or standing, of both Gentiles (**1:18—2:16**) and Jews (**2:17-29**). Both groups are sinners and stand in need of salvation, that is, God's righteousness (**3:23**). He explains the provision of salvation by God as in and through Jesus Christ. One receives God's righteousness by faith, not by works. One always works from justification, not to it. This righteousness that God imputes begins with faith and ends with faith. God's righteousness is a righteousness that is outside of humanity. This righteousness can only be credited (λογιψζομαι logizomai, "count, reckon, calculate; credit, place to one's account") to one who believes (**Chapter 4**). God's righteousness is something that is done to one; it is alien to every individual. Once one is put in a right relationship with God through faith, this person then wants to do whatever it takes to bring honor to

God. Those clothed with the righteousness of God do good, not as a condition of being forgiven, but in gratitude of forgiveness. For Paul, salvation is only the beginning of one's walk with God.

It is only in the Cross of Jesus that one discovers that God has done what must be done to reconcile sinful men and women unto Himself (**5:1-11**). Paul demonstrates this truth by calling attention to Christ as the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. For example, when one is "in Christ," he or she is freed from God's wrath (**Chapter 5**), freed from the dominion of sin (**Chapter 6**), freed from the curse of the Law (**Chapter 7**), and freed from condemnation (**Chapter 8**). In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. As one seeks to understand justification, one is conscious that justification is what God does for sinful humanity. In other words, justification is not a change in one's moral state; it is what God does—credits His righteousness—for both men and women who put their trust in Jesus. This righteousness that belongs to God is a righteousness that is outside both men and women. This righteousness from God is not personal holiness or even correct teaching.

Prior to Paul's comments in **Chapters 5**, **6**, **7**, and **8**, he elaborates on the negatives and the positives of justification by using Abraham as the model upon which to base one's relationship to God. Was Abraham justified by faith or by works? Just a perusal of **Chapter 4** reveals that he was not justified by works (**4:4-8**), that he was not justified by circumcision (**4:9-12**), that he was not justified by law (**4:13-15**), but rather he was justified by faith (**4:16—25**). Paul set forth Abraham's justification to give credence to his arguments that one can only be justified by faith alone. Before zeroing in on two kinds of righteousness—righteousness as an attribute and righteousness that is vicarious—one needs to pay attention to certain words or phrases that are peppered throughout this Book. In order to grasp the significance of God's plan of salvation by faith "in" and "through" Christ, it will help to observe the frequency of certain key phrases or key words in order for one to get a brief overall view of this most revealing Book. One's consciousness of the phrases that Paul employs through his Book helps one to focus more clearly on the place—"in Christ"—that salvation is found.

Throughout the **Book of Romans**, one discovers that Paul employs the word *gospel* twelve times (**1:1, 2, 9, 15, 16, 17; 2: 16; 11:28; 15:16, 19, 20, 25**). Another phrase—"through Him"—also attests to the fact that salvation can only be in Jesus. This unique expression occurs four times in Romans (**1:5; 5:9; 8:37; 11:36**). Paul also employs another combination with the word *through*. For example, he writes the following phrase—"through Jesus Christ"—five times in this Book (**1:8; 2:16; 5:21; 7:25; 16:27**). Again, Paul utilizes an additional phrase—"in Christ" to capture where salvation is found. He makes use of this phrase five times (**Romans 9:1; 12:5; 16:7, 9, 10**). "In Christ" also appears with Jesus' personal name "Jesus" six times (**6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 15:17; 16:3**). Once Paul varies his expression to "in Jesus" (**3:22**) and once to "in Jesus Christ" (**3:26**). The preposition "in" is used to capture the location of salvation. Listen to Paul, once more, as he seeks to call attention to the place of salvation with the following phrase, "in Him." This expression occurs five times (**4:24; 9:23; 10:11; 15:12, 13**). Paul uses other terms to communicate where salvation is found. For example, he uses the phrase "with Him" six times (**6:4, 5 [2x], 8; 8:32**). The word *faith* occurs forty times (**1:5, 8, 12, 17** [2x]; **3:3** [2x], **22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30**

[2x], **4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16** [2x], **20; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; 10:6, 8, 17; 11:20; 12:3, 6; 14:1, 2** [2x], **23** [2x], and the word *justified* crops up eight times (**3:24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 8:30** [2x] **10:10**).

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

As stated above, Paul uses the word gospel (eujaggevlion euaggelion, "good news") twelve times in the **Book of Romans**. It is significant that Paul utilizes this word *gospel* six times in the first chapter. The Gospel is Good News about God's way of salvation "in Christ" by faith, not works. The Good News is that God has done what is necessary for one's salvation. In other words, one's acceptance with God has been established "in" and "through" Jesus. In Jesus, one witnesses the love of God as a gift. The Good News is that God invaded history to free both men and women from the bondage of sin and guilt. It is in Christ that God has revolutionized one's relationship with Him. The Good News is about forgiveness in and through Jesus. The great mystery of the Christian faith is that when one accepts what Christ has done upon the Cross, one can accept the forgiveness that God offers through His love and mercy. In the Cross of Jesus, one discovers that everything necessary for one's forgiveness has been done. The Good News is that God Himself has provided the decisive safeguard for salvation—the Cross of Jesus is that event.

THROUGH AND IN CHRIST JESUS

Paul is fond of the words *in* and *through* in association with Christ. These two propositions help one to focus on the place of salvation offered by God's free grace. After Paul's introduction to the Book of Romans, he develops God's justification for His wrath against all ungodliness. In the fourth chapter, he explains the Good News of God—salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. In chapters five, six, seven, and eight, Paul lays out four main subjects: God's wrath, dominion of sin, curse of the Law, and condemnation. In these four chapters, Paul sets forth God's remedy and escape—Jesus Christ. As one reaches the end of chapter 5 about God's wrath, one observes Paul's way of escape: "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, [21] so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ (διαψ dia, "through") our Lord (5:20-21).

In the sixth Chapter Paul labors that humanity is under the dominion of Sin. Sin has dominion over both men and women. Yet, Paul answer to this dilemma is Jesus. Once more Paul refers to Jesus as the means of escape: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in[a] (εψν en, "in") Christ Jesus our Lord" (**6:23**).[1] In Chapter seven, Paul paints a rather dismal picture of the Law's curse. Yet, in this Chapter, Paul **lays** down the means of escape: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God—through (διαψ dia, "through") Jesus Christ our Lord (**7:24-25**)! Then, finally, in Chapter eight, he calls attention to condemnation of those outside Christ. Again, Paul paints a picture of Christ as the only means of escaping condemnation: "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in (εψν en, "in") Christ Jesus our Lord (**8:39**). In Chapter five and seven it is "through,"

but in Chapters six and eight, it is "in." For Paul, salvation can only be found "through" and "in" Him.

JUSTIFIED

The word *justified* occurs eight times in the **Book of Romans**. Its first occurrence is found in **Romans 3:24**. As Paul leads up to this phrase, he calls attention to righteousness from God that is essential for salvation. He brushes away all underbrush and goes right to the very core of justification:

> 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**3:21-24**).

One word that jumps out is the word *freely*. This word is from the Greek word δωρεαΨν dwrean, which means "without cost, as a free gift, for nothing." This word takes on great significance when one looks at this same word in **John 15:25**: "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'[b]" The phrase "without reason" is from the Greek word δωρεαΨν dwrean, which is the same word translated "freely" in **Romans 3:24**. Paul is saying, in **3:24**, that God justifies the sinner without a cause on his or her behalf; it is all of grace. Then, just after this note about "justified freely by his grace," he again uses the word *justified* for a second time in order to reinforce this concept of salvation by grace: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:28**). To reinforce the means of "justification by faith," Paul introduces Abraham in order to prove beyond the shadow-of-a-doubt that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not works. Paul introduces the subject of justification by dealing with works: "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness"[a] (**4:2-3**). How was Abraham justified? Paul says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Paul concludes his arguments with this summary:

> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (**3:23-25**).

After citing the Old Testament to prove his thesis—justification by faith—he begins the fifth chapter by stating: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we[b] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (**5:1-2**). To help one understand "imputed righteousness," one needs to begin with **Romans 1:17**. An understanding of this verse will lay the

groundwork for comprehension of this most misunderstood way of God saving humanity.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IMPUTED TO ONE WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST ROMANS 1:17 AND 10:3-4

The very hub of justification by faith begins with **Romans 1:17**. Christians must distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living (**Chapter 12**) and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is, a righteousness done for humanity (**1:16-17**). What is the "righteousness of God" in **1:17** and **10:3-4**? Is it the righteousness that justifies the sinner or the righteousness of the Christian life? The question is: Does Paul employ the word "righteousness" in the sense of that which is imputed to man or in the sense of that which man performs? Does this righteousness involve one's keeping the commandments of God?[2] Or, is this a righteousness that is outside man? Is the righteousness in **1:17** and **10:3-4** imputed or earned?[3] Put another way, how is man placed in a right relationship with God? Is it by imputation or by works? Even though both kinds of righteousness appear in the **Book of Romans**, the question still remains concerning the proper exegesis of the above passages. Since Paul employs the word "righteousness" in both senses, one must exercise discriminating judgment in distinguishing between the various nuances based upon context in which the term is used. One must distinguish between the "righteousness of faith" and "the righteousness of holy living" (sanctification).[4] "Active" righteousness is the fruit of "passive" righteousness. Sanctification (active) is the fruit of righteousness by faith (passive).[5]

In **Romans 1-8**, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. Even though he stresses justification by faith alone, or imputed righteousness, in the first eight chapters, he, nevertheless, addresses the fact that all Christians are servants of righteousness. God is concerned about holiness in the lives of those to whom He has imputed His righteousness. But the focus of the first part of Romans is imputed righteousness, that is to say, how a man is placed in a right relationship with God. Thus, Paul's emphasis is upon "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (**Romans 1:17**). More clearly put, the emphasis is upon the righteousness of God, separate and apart from works of law, imputed to man through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the theme of these eight chapters is: How can a man be justified? Is it by works or by faith? After Paul's emphasis on justification by faith,[6] he demonstrates graphically that holiness is the believer's spiritual worship. Thus, Paul begins chapter twelve with emphasis upon holy living, not for justification, but as the means of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice which is one's worship. Once an individual is free from God's wrath through Jesus Christ, Paul emphasizes the behavior of those who through faith are righteous. Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord (**Titus 2:12-14**).[7] "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness," said Paul (**Romans 6:18**). Those in Christ are "servants of God," and therefore, they are to "have fruit unto holiness" (**Romans 6:22**).

But the word "righteousness" (dikaiosuvnh, dikaiosuvnh) in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4** is much more comprehensive than personal holiness or even correct teaching.[8]

This righteousness is the righteousness of the new aeon—the righteousness of God[9] revealed through Jesus Christ. When Paul articulates the "righteousness of God" in **Romans 1:17** and Romans **10:3-4,** he is not using the word "righteousness" as an activity on the part of man but as an activity on the part of God. Perhaps to better clarify, God gives us Christ as "righteousness." This "righteousness" is not the "righteousness of law," but the "righteousness of God."

The law of God can never, under any circumstances, be a way of salvation, not even for one "in Christ" (**Romans 7:14-25**). Paul differentiates between the "righteousness of law" and the "righteousness of faith." If one is to have a correct understanding of the "righteousness of God," without law, it is essential that one distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is to say, a righteousness that is done for us, not in us.[10] This righteousness *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith, not good deeds performed, or works of the law, or a correct understanding of Scripture.

Imputed righteousness is entirely outside the behavior of the believer.[11] It is the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus.[12] Adding anything to this substitutionary work and calling it our righteousness by faith is blasphemy. We work from justification, not to it. Justification is the mother of sanctification.[13] Before justification, man was the "servant of sin," but after justification, he is a "servant of righteousness" (**Romans 6:16-22**).

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND THE LIFE OF HOLINESS
ROMANS 6

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned about right conduct,[14] even as the law is.[15] This is self-evident from Paul's arguments in **Romans, chapter 6**, about "free from sin." No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. It is not in that sense that a Christian is "free from the law." But it is only "in Christ"[16] that the law is fulfilled in us (**Romans 8:4**). This fulfillment is not something accomplished by man, but by God in Christ. Even though man is "free from sin," nevertheless, he is exhorted to "yield" his "members servants to righteousness unto holiness (**Romans 6:19b**)." Since man cannot keep the law perfectly, Christ's right conduct is credited to man through faith.[17] The Gospel is insistent upon man's holiness in the presence of God. The Gospel does not do away with law as an expression of God's will.[18]

Paul, in essence, says this very thing in **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." We do not dismiss the law, the gospel establishes it. "To Paul there can be no thought of the law dying. It is not a case of the Christian's decision to regard the law as repealed and nonexistent . . . . Nor can it be said that, with the coming of Christ, the law was outdated and abolished," says Nygren.[19] There is a distinction between the "law dying" and the believer "dying to the law."

In **Romans 7**, Paul specifically states that the believer is "dead to the law" and is "delivered from the law" (**Romans 7:4, 6**).[20] This death to the law is the only way one can escape the "wrath of God." Even though the Christian is "Not under law";

nevertheless, he or she delights in God's law. Paul sets forth the question: "Is the law sin?" (**Romans 7:7**). No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (**Romans 7:12**). The Christian delights in the law of God after the inward man (**Romans 7:22**). Paul not only delighted in God's law, but he also served the law of God. For example, he writes: "with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (**Romans 7:25**). Even though Paul served the law of God, he did not serve the law of God for justification. Christians work not TO justification, but FROM justification.[21] Paul stresses that God's grace teaches believers to live holy lives:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works (**Titus 2:11-14**).

PURPOSE OF GOD'S GOSPEL

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant to do? What is it supposed to achieve? Is the Gospel merely to forgive sinners and deliver them from hell? No! The end of the gospel is to reveal an answer to Job's question: "How shall a man be just with God?" (**Job 9:2**). The business of the gospel is to make persons righteous in His sight, to make people acceptable to God, to enable individuals to stand in the presence of one's Holy God. How does God accomplish this feat? It is only by the fact that one is in Christ that one can stand in the presence of a Holy God. Christ has become for everyone all that God requires of one.

Justification is the central purpose of the Gospel of God. In the Gospel, God reveals righteousness apart from law. The "righteousness apart from law" is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness from God does not make void the just requirements of the law; rather it establishes the law's goal.[22] It is this righteousness apart from the law that Paul calls the "righteousness of God." Thus, the status of righteousness that the law sought to bring about is now realized in anyone who accepts Jesus as God's appointed means of salvation. To restate this truth concisely, "the righteousness of God" comes to one through faith in Jesus.

Can a one be just with God through law keeping? No! If one is "under law," any law, Old Testament or New Testament, then, before one can be placed in a right relationship with God, the law of God must be kept perfectly in every respect. James, brother of Jesus, explains this thought in this way: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (**James 2:10**). The law condemns. Under law one is under God's Wrath (**Romans 5**), under the dominion of Sin **(Romans 6**), under the curse of the Law (**Romans 7**), and under Condemnation (**Romans 8**). How can man escape the *wrath* of God, the *dominion* of sin, the *curse* of the law, and God's *condemnation*?[23] There is only one way; namely, "in and through Jesus Christ."[24] This is what the Gospel is all about. This is the whole glory of the gospel. Why did Paul rejoice in the Gospel? He gives us his answer: "For in the

gospel (ejn aujtw'/ ejn aujtw, "in it") a righteousness from God is revealed" (**Romans 1:17**).

In one's confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and belief in His resurrection, one receives the "righteousness of God," apart from law. God does not loose the just requirements of His moral law,[25] but He upholds his demands through Jesus. In one's acknowledgment and acceptance of Jesus as God's way of salvation, God imputes,[26] that is to say, credits, to that individual the righteousness of his Son. Where justification is exalted, the law of God is elevated. Justification by faith makes the law and the sinner friends: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (**Romans 7:22**).

Even though Paul expresses his delight in the law of God, he does not delight in the law of God for justification. Why? In **Romans 3:19-20**, Paul sets forth the terrifying aspects of the law. He says that the law of God shuts every man's mouth, no man can boast. But the apostle does not leave man in despair; he gives hope to sinful man. Paul reveals how a man can be righteous before a holy God. Immediately, he develops this righteousness from God, apart from law. Paul's assessment of man's situation is full of hope, he writes:

> But now a righteousness from God apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

"BUT NOW"—THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL
ROMANS 3:21-24

"But now" (ΝυνιΨ δεψ Nuni de) is the heart of the Gospel of Christ.[27] This "but now" is how faith answers the indictment of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—"but now." No man ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of his holy law. Well, is there hope for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The Apostle answers these questions. How? "But now!" Yes, God's grace provides the righteousness his law demands. The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for man in Christ Jesus. "But now" is man's defense against the curse of law. This is the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel tells us of a righteousness from God, a righteousness provided by God, *in* and *through* our Lord Jesus Christ (**3:24**). Jesus has satisfied the law of God on man's behalf. He fulfilled the law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is *external* to man, a righteousness that is *alien* to man, a righteousness that is *passive* to man, a righteousness that is *imputed* to man.[28] This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it.[29] But God unfolds it and presents it on display in the Gospel of his crucified Son;

Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the Gospel. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals his way of redeeming sinners and upholding his holiness. Paul poignantly captures this truth when he pens:

> God presented him a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

IMPUTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF CHRIST ROMANS 3:25-26

Justification by faith is a legal transaction[30] related to God's law and to divine jurisprudence. The idea of imputation (righteousness that is credited to man) is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement (Christ died as a substitute for man).[31] Imputation and substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. The ultimate act of salvation is in the Christ event. Thus, it is fitting to call God's redemptive act in Christ "the righteousness of God." This righteousness is *furnished* by God, *devised* by God, *made obtainable* by God. It is God's salvation from beginning to end. The prophets testify to this event. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:6**)." Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, writes:

> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:5, 11-12**).

Not only is the "righteousness of God" that which belongs to His Son Jesus that comes to every individual through faith, but Jesus is the "righteousness of God." Paul, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4**, is not talking about acts of righteousness, or the doing of good deeds, but rather the issue of "imputed righteousness"—a righteousness bestowed upon man through faith in His Son Jesus. If one is to understand "imputed righteousness," he or she, first of all, must understand how one becomes a sinner before God. Sensitivity to this question will shed great light on how one becomes righteous before God.

Paul speaks of this righteousness as coming from God, not man; he describes it as "God's righteousness." Very succinctly, he writes about "a righteousness from God, apart from law" (**Romans 3:21**). This "righteousness from God" is Christ's faithfulness, truthfulness, and obedience to God's law. These attributes of Christ are *credited* to the believer as his own. Paul uses *credited* (λογιψζομαι logizomai) eleven times in Chapter four of Romans.

The central thought in justification is that, although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (**4:9-19**), God declares him righteous through the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our righteousness. Paul aptly stresses the centrality of the gospel: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). Jesus is our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. This is the only means by which sinful man can stand before his God. One can only boast in the Lord, not his works of righteousness. Jesus is "our everything."

ABRAHAM AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS
ROMANS 4

Brinsmead captures the essence of imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ when he writes:

> The whole concept of imputation is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement. Imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other. . . . God laid our sins on Jesus Christ by imputation. He "was numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12). This is how He was made. . . to be sin for us." There was nothing in Him worthy of death. But He was condemned by the righteous judgment of God, for He had been made to be sin by imputation. In this sense it was right that Christ should suffer the wrath of God. He had to be treated *as if* He were a sinner.[32]

Paul expounds upon the principle of justification by faith by using Abraham to prove that the "righteousness of God" is *credited* to man "through faith." Since the Scripture is its best interpreter, one should look to "it is written" for one's understanding of that which God reveals to His people through the Holy Spirit. Note the following Scriptures:

> Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation (**Romans 4:4**).
> His faith is *credited* as righteousness (**Romans 4:5**).
> David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works (**Romans 4:6**).
> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him (**Romans 4:8**).
> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith (**Romans 4:13**).
> The words "it was *credited* to him" were not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (**Romans 4:24**).

Again, one should reflect upon Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he contemplates the "righteousness of God." For example, "Christ Jesus . . . has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1**

Corinthians 1:30). This "righteousness of God" is JESUS CHRIST. Remember, "the Scriptures foresaw," says Paul, "that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you" (**Galatians 2:8**). Paul very vividly describes the "righteousness that is by faith":

> Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says:
> The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (**Romans 10:5, 6, 8, 10**).

One must be careful that he or she does not fall into the same error of the Jews, that is to say, seeking to establish one's own righteousness through law keeping. It is not uncommon for believers today to seek justification through "absolute perfection" in knowledge and obedience (sanctification) to God. One may be mistaken about many things taught in the Scriptures, but one's salvation is NOT contingent upon absolute freedom from error in knowledge nor is one's salvation conditional upon perfect obedience to law. One's salvation is dependent upon one's acceptance of Jesus, who is God's righteousness, the savior of the world. If the head is righteous, then the body is righteous.

To state more fully, this righteousness is unattainable by obedience to any law, old or new, or by merit of one's own initiative, or any other condition than that of faith "in Christ." It *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith (**Romans 1:17b**). Nygren pinpoints this truth: "Faith is the beginning and the culmination."[33] The man or woman who trusts in Christ becomes "the righteousness of God in Him."[34] One becomes "in Christ" all that God requires a man or woman to be, all that he or she could never be in-and-of themselves. Thus, everyone must conclude that a person is justified "freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Freedom from *wrath*, *sin*, *law*, and *condemnation* is *in* and *through* Jesus Christ our Lord (**Romans 5:21b**; **6:23b**; **7:25b**; **8:39b**). Is it any wonder that Paul writes "Therefore having been justified by faith, peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 5:1**). "Faith alone"[35] means that the righteousness of God's provisions is everything necessary for one's salvation. It is "from faith to faith," said Paul (**Romans 1:17**). Paul stresses, as stated above, forcefully this truth with double prepositions: it *begins* with faith and it *ends* with faith. Robert Brinsmead correctly states:

> **Imputation.** The words *impute, reckon, account, credit* all come from the Greek word *logizomai,* which is used eleven times in Romans 4. The believer has righteousness imputed or credited to him (Rom. 4:6). This is "the righteousness of One," even Christ (Rom. 5:18, KJV). Paul is not talking about the believer's experience but about his status in the judgment of God. Imputation of our sins to Christ (Rom. 5:19-21) and of His righteousness to us deals with legal realities. Neither the imputation of sin

nor of righteousness means a change of character of the object. But it does change the way the object is regarded. Surely Calvary is the proof of this.[36]

SINNERS THROUGH ADAM
ROMANS 5:15-19

To appreciate more fully the subject of righteousness through imputation, one must reflect upon Paul's analogy between the first Adam and the second Adam (**Romans 5:15-19**). One does not become a sinner because of something that happens within; but one is a sinner because of something that took place outside man in another person, namely, Adam. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (**Romans 5:15-19**). Adam was the first father. He stood as the federal head. The whole human race is constituted in him. When Adam fell, it was the same as if every man had fallen.[37] Paul maintains that through one man (Adam), death reigned, and through one man (Jesus), the gift of righteousness reigns:

> But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (**Romans 5:15-19**).

In **Romans 5**, Paul develops imputation from Adam as well as imputation from Christ. God reverses the fall of Adam by giving the human race another Father, as it is written:

> For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**).[38]

Just as the whole race is comprehended in Adam, so God comprehends all faithful humanity in His Son. Jesus became the new Head, the Representative, the Father of the fallen race. Robert Brinsmead captures the essence of the righteousness of God, when he says, "Jesus was the total outlay of heaven's treasure, the accumulated love and wealth of eternity, the totality of God's righteousness."[39] Paul burst forth in rapturous language when he writes: "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). In Paul's second letter to Corinth, he captures the very essence of the Gospel:

> That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:19a, 21**).

JESUS: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD
ROMANS 10:1-17

Again, one must ask the question: What is this righteousness? IT IS JESUS! God's righteousness is revealed historically and transacted in the Christ event.[40] Paul makes abundantly clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness because Christ obeyed, even unto death. In the time of Christ and the apostles, the Jews, as a whole, did not comprehend this external righteousness that is credited, or imputed, to man. They went about to establish their own righteousness rather than submit to God's righteousness, which is Jesus.[41]

When one speaks of the righteousness of God, he or she is addressing the subject of justification by faith. In analyzing justification by faith, Paul discusses the relationship of the law to the believer. The believer is dead to the law. The believer is free from law. Paul argues that "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**). But the Jews were pursuing righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Thus, Paul deals with this illegal use of the law, namely, a pursuance of righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Paul further elaborates this issue in his **epistle to the Galatians**. He asserts that:

> A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**Galatians 2:16**).

Paul's concern for the Jews lies in the fact that they were going about to establish their relationship to God upon their works rather than upon the work of Christ. He does not reject obedience to the law,[42] but rejects righteousness by works, that is, the attempt to use the law to put God in one's debt. Paul writes: "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (**Romans 3:20**). From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person not guilty. From the positive viewpoint, he declares him righteous. Again, Paul exclaims: This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:2-24**).

Although all are sinners, God declares everyone who puts his or her trust in Jesus not guilty, but righteous. This legal declaration is valid because Christ lived a perfect life and died to pay the penalty for our sins; thus, His righteousness is credited to man. This imputed righteousness is the central theme of Romans, as Paul expresses this truth in **1:17**: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a

righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the primary objective of this overview is to unfold God's plan of salvation in and through Jesus. This essay is not intended to be a verse-by-verse exegesis of the **Book of Romans**, but rather the primary objective has been to set forth the central theme of the Book—justification by faith in Jesus. This analysis of Romans also focuses on holiness in the life of the believer. In other words, every believer is called to become in his or her daily living what he or she already is "in Christ." God demands actions as well as believing. Faith expresses itself in obedience. In **Romans 12:1—16:27**, Paul turns to the practical application of justification by faith. This does not mean, as pointed out earlier, that he had not already pointed out the necessity of Christian living (**Chapters 6—8**), but, beginning with **Chapter 12**, he goes into detail to show that Jesus Christ is to be Lord of every area of one's life. Paul stresses in **Romans 3:31** that being set free in Jesus does not liberate one from obedience to the Law. Paul writes: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (**3:31**). Even though Christians delight in God's law, nevertheless, one can never earn his or her salvation through Law keeping. Listen once more to Paul as he explains: "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:27-28**). Again, the words of Paul ring out loud and clear: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (**3:20**).

If one cannot be justified through the Law, How does God justify the ungodly? Brinsmead, once more, goes right to the heart of the matter when he says,

> How can a Judge who is supremely just justify the ungodly? Paul's answer is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is true that the believer is wholly a sinner in himself and will in this life continue to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). But God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus. And on this basis God can declare him righteous and treat him as if he were righteous.[43]

For one to be justified, one must be obedient to the faith (**Romans 1:5; 10:3**; **10:16**). But what does it mean to be "obedient to the faith"? What does it mean to "submit to the righteousness of God"? What does it mean to "obey the gospel"? All three phrases are synonymous. It means to submit yourselves to the "righteousness" made available through the redemption that is "in Christ Jesus." The Jews sought a salvation through law keeping, that is, "righteousness by law," rather than salvation through faith in the Christ event, that is, "righteousness through faith." The Jews, as a whole, did not "obey the gospel." To state more forcefully, they did not submit to God's way of salvation—Jesus.

Paul's argument is that man's righteousness cannot be built from below, but from above. God's imputed righteousness is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ. The only righteousness is the righteousness of faith. "A righteousness of God IN IT [Gospel] is revealed from faith to faith" (**Romans 1:17**). Paul employs, as mentioned

above, two prepositions to emphasize the faith principle:ϕ ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin (ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, "from faith to faith"). Paul drives home the point of one's justification—this righteousness begins with faith and ends with faith. It is God's righteousness, not man's righteousness through compliance with the teachings of God. The following passage is worth quoting in full, showing as it does the proper definition of faith:

> We must be careful, however, about our definition of faith, and what faith does, and where faith comes in. Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. That is where that teaching I have just been denouncing goes wrong; it says that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's Cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which links us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.[44]

The righteousness of God, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3**, is the righteousness *prepared* by God, *m**ade** available* by God, and *imparted* by God to man through faith. In these Scriptures Paul is writing about the righteousness that God declares to man, not man's holiness through holy deeds. The paramount thought is the state of being "in the right," not by works, but by Jesus. The only way man can be in union with God is through God's anointed One. No amount of good deeds can put a man right with God—only Jesus can accomplish this performance. How does God's righteousness come to man? The Scripture says "through faith."[45] Faith always points away from itself, it rests for salvation on Christ's union with God. Faith is the channel or instrument through which God's righteousness is imputed to the believer.

The law is *not* the answer to the problem of sin, but *Jesus is.* The law of God is not life, but *Jesus **is***. Grace bestows mercy, but law demands death. Yes, the written code demands death, but the Spirit gives life. It is Christ or law, not Christ and law. The Christian is not under law, but under grace. The Christian still delights in the law of God. The believer still serves the law of God, but not for justification. Remember, Paul argues the ethical implications of the law in Romans:

> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of **wickedness**, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you

> are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:12-18**).

As stated above, every believer is called to become what he or she already is in Christ. One cannot have Christian morality without having faith in Jesus, the Savior of the world. Are you really living in the love of God so that you reflect the rays of His light in your life? One cannot read the **Book of Romans** without awareness that Paul desires that in the inner life of every Christians that Christ comes to birth in a real and meaningful way. This life, according to **Romans 12**, is not intended to be merely inward, but to manifest itself outwardly. Christ has been given in order that a transformation may also come about in the lives of men and women.

The life of every believer is meant to be a life that mirrors the image of Jesus. Just a casual reading of **Romans 14—16** reveals that God desires that Christians live in love and in fellowship with one another, not in isolation from each other. Christians are to receive one another in the same way that Christ receives each individual—warts and all (**Romans 15:1-7**). Paul lays down the principles of Christian living in unity and love in **Romans 14—16**. In **Romans 6**, Paul discusses the ethical implications of one's dying with Christ. One must ask the question: How can anyone appropriate the gift of redemption and live a life in defiance of God's rich grace?

Humanity is fast stuck in the mire of sin so that men and women cannot deliver themselves from God's wrath, from the dominion of sin, from the curse of the law, and from God's condemnation. It is God's act in Christ that gives humanity a new standing. The Cross of Christ flashes like neon lights with the following picture: In Christ, God's love meets sinful humanity. God's love is not just an attitude; God's love is not just an act; God's love is the very essence of God. In the words of Paul: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us" (**5:8**). The **Book of Romans** is about how God comes to humanity "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ annihilates boasting on the part of men and women (**3:19-20**). Paul drives home the point that men and women do not find a way to God, but rather God comes to men and women in and through Jesus (**3:21-31**).

The message of hope for salvation is Jesus. One cannot read this powerful presentation of the Gospel by Paul without being wrapped up in wonder and awe and impelled to bow in humble adoration and praise for such grace (**1:8-10**). Again, one should remind himself or herself that salvation is not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin separating humanity from God is removed. For one to live in faith in the Son of God is to live in a spirit of thankfulness (**16:25-27**). The Gospel is about God's love, and God's love takes hold of everyone in Christ. This love of God manifested in the lives of His people can only be grounded in Jesus. The only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance is love grounded in Jesus (Chapter **14—16**).

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a Or *through*

[1] All Scripture citations are from the *International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

b Psalms 35:19; 69:4

a Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22

a Or *let us*

b Or *let us*

[2] Although Christians are justified by "faith alone," not faith and works; nevertheless, Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord. Paul writes that the grace of God: "Teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (**Titus 2:12-14**). Again, he pens: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (**Romans 6:18**). Righteousness of faith always leads to righteousness of life.

Holiness is the legitimate fruit of the righteousness of faith and the proof that faith is the genuine article (**James 2:14-18**). Sanctification is not optional for the believer. One cannot be saved by sanctification, but one cannot be saved without it. A person who is dead to holiness is not righteous by faith. The gospel of "free justification" saves the believer to holiness. Alister E. McGrath, ***Justification by Faith*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 57, says: "A distinction is made between *justification* and *sanctification* (or regeneration): the former is the work of God outside us, the latter his work within us."

[3] "Imputed" is from logivzomai (logizomai, "reckon, calculate, take inventory, count, consider") and is employed by Paul 34 times out of a total of 41 times in the New Testament. The Greek word is an accountant's word. In other words, God "credits" righteousness to believers through faith, not through law.

[4] Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 102, captures the essence of "sanctification," when he writes:

> Sanctification, or holiness (the two words are virtually interchangeable), is essentially conformity to the moral character of God. We normally think of sanctification as progressive, as an inner change of our character whereby we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ. That is certainly a major part of sanctification, but that is not all of it. Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more. The first is the result of the work of Christ for us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

[5] For an excellent discussion concerning "active" and "passive" righteousness, see Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness of God*, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 9-25, 57-74.

[6] Justification means to declare righteous, not to make subjectively righteous. Justification by faith in Jesus the Messiah changes our relationship to God, but justification is not a change in our moral state. Justification is what God does for us. Justification does not indicate a change in us, but it does constitute a change in the way God views us. Justification must not be merged with sanctification. One ***must not*** shift the ground of salvation from the vicarious righteousness of Christ to the personal righteousness of the believer—vicarious means it is done for us, not in us. It is by faith that the sinner

accepts the vicarious atonement of Jesus, that is to say, Jesus as the righteousness of God. Yes, justification is by "faith alone," but sanctification is NOT by "faith alone." "Faith alone" means that the righteousness of God's arrangement is everything essential for redemption. Living a life of purity depends on faith, but not faith alone.

[7] See Robert Brinsmead, *Sanctification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980, 7, where Brinsmead expresses himself most forthrightly in his comments on sanctification:

> We have taken a strong stand for the Pauline doctrine of justification by an outside-of-me righteousness as opposed to the subjectivism of the current religious scene. But Paul's doctrine of justification by faith did not do away with the law. It merely put the law in its right place (Rom. 3:31). Our purpose is not to exalt justification and degrade sanctification. We want to put sanctification in its proper place so that we can give it the great emphasis it deserves.

[8] Some Christians relate these two passages to a so-called worship service. In other words, if one utilizes individual cups in the Lord's supper, instrumental music in Sunday morning worship, Sunday school for different ages, orphan homes, Bible colleges, etc., it is argued by some that one is not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God if one adopts any of the above practices. Thus, the "righteousness of God" is identified with correct mental understanding of the Scriptures, not the righteousness made available by God through faith in Jesus.

[9] It is called the "righteousness of God" because His grace provides it. The "righteousness of God" is God's redemptive act in Christ.

[10] See Robert Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), where Brinsmead draws attention to this great truth:

> The Bible makes clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. Sin was dealt with, Satan was defeated, death was destroyed, and redemption was accomplished. This mighty action of God, which transcends every other action for all eternity, was not a work done in us (moral). It was a work done outside us in the person of Christ (legal).

[11] Throughout **Romans 3** and **4**, Paul examines righteousness being imputed rather than the believer's holiness of life. On the other hand, in the next four chapters (**5-8**), he turns his attention to the life that righteousness by faith demands. In chapters three and four, He sets forth the righteousness of God as something objective to us, reckoned to us, or set to our account; therefore, this righteousness is not internal work.

[12] In **Romans 1:17a** Paul speaks of faith. In writing about faith, Paul uses the double expression "through faith for faith" (ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, ek pistews eis pistin). This is Paul's way of excluding the thought of a righteousness of one's own, attained through law and works. By this joining of phrases (from faith to faith) the last crumb of works-righteousness is uprooted.

[13] Sanctification means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service (**2 Corinthians 6:17**). Sanctification is a continual cleansing and separation from sin; it is a continual growth in the attributes of the divine character. See also Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 13, where Brinsmead aptly stresses the centrality of sanctification:

> So, on the one hand, sanctification means separation from sin, from unholy fellowship, from the abomination of the heathen, from the world and its allurements, from the ways of the

ungodly. And, on the other hand, it means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service.

[14] The reformers stressed the distinction between the legal and moral aspects of redemption, that is, between justification and sanctification. Paul negates law as a method of salvation, not as a valid demand of a righteous God. See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 27. Where he captures the legal and moral aspects of redemption: "Any reformation of life and conduct not based on God's law is fraud. Jesus said, 'If you love Me, you will obey what I command' (**John 14:15**). While the law points us to Christ, Christ points us back to the law."

[15] Since the subject of justification by faith is not very well understood by many Christians, it is necessary to use the literary technique of "repetition" to instill this vital teaching into the hearts of God's people. In fact, there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

[16] To be "in Christ" is to be beyond the pale of the law's power. It is to be free from the "curse of the law" (**Galatians 3:10-13**). The person that is outside the realm of faith, that is, Christ, the realm of the law still rules. To be under law is to be under "wrath," "sin," and "condemnation." This is where the "good news" comes into play. Paul writes: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**).

[17] Christ fulfilled the covenantal stipulations of the Ten Commandments; Christ kept God's commandments (**John.15:10**); He fulfilled the law (**Matthew. 5:17**); He was obedient (**Philippians 2:5-9**; **Hebrews 5:7-9**); The obedience of Christ to the law of God constitutes His righteousness. The obedience of Christ was consummated in His death on the cross (**Philippians 2:8**). One might also say that Christ's act of atonement is the righteousness of Christ.

[18] See **2 Timothy 3:16-17**: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

[19] Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1967), 272.

[20] The Greek text states: "you were put to death (ejqanatwvqhte, ejqanatwvqhte) to the law" (**verse 4**), and "we were discharged (kathrghvqhmen, kathrghvqhmen) from the law" (**verse 6**).

[21] Brinsmead, ***God Righteousness of*** *God*, 106.

[22] See **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." See Brinsmead, ***Sanctification***, 8, where he correctly says: "We want to make clear that justification by faith alone is not an alternative to personal holiness but the only basis for it."

[23] I am indebted to Anders Nygren for calling attention to these concepts in his *Commentary on Romans*.

[24] Paul concludes chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 with "in and through Jesus." Chapter 5 is "*through* Jesus" (verse 21); chapter 6 is "*in* Jesus" (verse 23); chapter 7 is "*through* Jesus" (verse 25); chapter 8 is "*in* Jesus" (verse 39).

[25] Jesus told His disciples:

Do not think that I have come to abolish (katalusai) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of

these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**Mt. 5:17-19**).

[26] In the New Testament, this doctrine of "imputation" is given far-reaching attention. It is alluded to in **Romans 4:6-25** concerning Abraham's faith and his justification. Also, Paul mentions this in his second letter to Corinth: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). James also makes notice of "imputed righteousness" when he writes: "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (**James 2:23**). This word appears over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible—examples are**: Leviticus 7:18**; **2 Samuel 19:19**; **Psalms 32:2**.

[27] I am grateful to Dr. Lloyd Jones for much of my insight concerning justification by faith. The late Dr. Jones, one of the ablest and most respected Bible expositors of the twentieth century, wrote several volumes on Romans. For an illustration of his ability to express clearly the teachings of Romans, see D. M. Lloyd Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 27 where he says:

'But now.' This is the essence of the Christian position; this is how faith answers the accusations of the Law, the accusations of conscience, and everything else that would condemn and depress us. These are indeed very wonderful words, and it is most important that we should lay hold of them and realize their tremendous importance and their real significance.

[28] Christian writer Leon Morris has penned some compelling words that need to be heard. See Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1983) 187, where he says:

An important idea in the New Testament is that righteousness may be imputed. There are grounds for imputation in an Old Testament passage, that in which we read, 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' (Gn.15:6). This presents a problem to some modern people, because we so firmly believe that righteousness is an ethical quality. It is 'being good.' In that sense it is nonsense to talk about righteousness being imputed. Everyone who aspires to this kind of righteousness must merit it for himself, by right living. It cannot be 'credited' or 'reckoned' or 'imputed' to him other than in some fictitious and fanciful sense. But when we see righteousness as basically legal, as 'right-standing', it is another matter. A standing or status can be conferred. The narrative says that God conferred this status on Abraham because of his faith. Paul uses this as his classic example of justification by faith. Abraham received his 'right-standing' not on account of any meritorious action but simply because he trusted God.

[29] Peter writes about the angels' intense desire to know something about this salvation:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**I Peter 1:10-12**).

[30] See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 21, where he points out that:

> The atonement was a satisfaction made to the divine law (legal) as well as a demonstration of God's love to change our hearts (moral). Salvation consists in a change in our standing before the law, which is called justification (legal), as well as a change in our state, which is called sanctification (moral).

[31]The following extract from Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 52, may explain more clearly the substitutionary work of Christ:

> The work of the Second Person of the Godhead was *substitutionary*. He lived for us a sinless life. He stood in our place in the judgment of God and was wounded for our transgressions. He rose again for our justification. And as our Representative, Substitute and Surety, He now presents the merits of His life and death on our behalf in the presence of the Father. These glorious redemptive acts are substitutionary. They were done for us. They were done outside us and without our effort or aid.

[32] Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA., 1980), 87.

[33] Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 78.

[34] **Second Corinthians 5:21**: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

[35] By "faith alone" I mean justification through faith on account of what Christ accomplished for mankind through His atonement. Man is passive and God is active in one's justification. The righteousness that God imputes to man through faith is "alien righteousness," that is, it is something given to man *in* and *through* Jesus Christ. God offers man salvation as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One is reconciled to God in and through Jesus. Faith is the earthen vessel, or channel, that conveys the treasure of Christ to sinful man.

[36] Robert Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA, 1980), 45.

[37] For an excellent and insightful analysis of the two aeons, see Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 16-37.

[38] See also **Romans 10:1-17**. Jesus is God's way of Righteousness, not works!

[39] Robert D. Brinsmead, *Justification*, 29.

[40] Robert Brinsmead seems to have fully assessed the Christ event. See Robert Brinsmead, *Justification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 63, where Brinsmead captures the Christ event:

> In no sense is God's gift of justification something done in man. We may correctly say that the righteousness of God in the Christ event is communicated to the believer by *imputation* (Rom. 4), but it is scandalous to say that it can be communicated to us by *impartation*

(infusion). The righteousness of God is a once-for-all event which took place two thousand years ago. Even God Himself cannot reenact it outside of us, to say nothing of doing it in us. But what Christ did He did as our Substitute. Therefore, His life was really our life, and His death our death. God counts them as ours. That is what justifies. Or to put it another way, what He did He did as our Representative, so that we lived and died and rose again in Him.

[41] See **Romans 10:1-3**. The Jews sought justification through obedience to law, not Jesus as God's way of salvation. It is not uncommon for Christians also to seek their "own righteousness," or justification before God, through complete understanding of the Word of God, not Jesus as God's appointed means of right-standing. Many Christians have a zeal for legitimate-standing before God, but not in agreement to God's plan of imputed righteousness based upon faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Today, among many believers in the Messiah, righteousness is pursued by exactness in knowledge and by perfection in obedience to a so-called "new law," that is to say, the New Testament Scriptures.

Flawlessness in knowledge is the battle cry; but freedom from error is not a condition of salvation, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by attainment to an assured ratio of knowledge, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by accomplishment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ. It is by belief of facts related to Him and not by grasp of abstract truth that one is justified before God. One's justification before God is neither by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When Christians postulate a program of justification by knowledge, then, they hang themselves on the very gallows they have constructed to rid themselves of others, unless they are prepared to make themselves even more ridiculous by affirming they know as much as God.

[42] No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. Every believer is "free from the law," but not above the law, see **Romans 7**. The law is given by God, and is an expression of His holy will. McGrath, *Justification **by** Faith*, 117, is especially helpful in this area when he writes:

The gift of our justification lays upon us the *obligation* to live in accordance with our new status. We are *made children* of God through our justification as an act of free grace -- and now we must act in accordance with this transformation. The slogan 'Become what you are!' neatly summarizes this situation and encapsulates the essence of Pauline ethics with some brilliance. In justification we are made to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:15-16): therefore we must shine out as lights in a dark world, as a city on a hill (v. 14; Phil. 2:15). Our justification brings about a new obedience—an obedience that would not be conceivable before our justification and that ultimately rests on the grace of God.

[43] Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith*, 76.

[44] D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification**, 120.***

[45] See **Romans 4:5**, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Again, **Romans 5:1**, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ." Finally, **Romans 3:22**, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Raised From the Dead to Live a New Life

Thrust Statement: **God wants His children to separate themselves from the world.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 6: 1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17**

God performs a miracle in the rebirth of every individual. When one is born from above, one is raised from the dead to live a "new life." In this "new life," one is reborn for eternity. Every rebirth represents a death that one voluntarily enters. Through spiritual death, one becomes a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. When one dies with Christ, one dies to one kind of life and is born to another kind of life. In Christian baptism, one experiences more than just an ethical change in one's behavior. In one's acceptance of Christ in Christian baptism, one experiences real identification with God. The rebirth is not just an emotional experience—it is that—but identification. In the words of William Barclay: "Christianity can never be only an experience of the inner being; it must be a life in the market-place."[1] The outcome of this rebirth is depicted as a "new creation." Christians have put off the "old man" and put on the "new man" (**Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9**). Again, Barclay writes: "The man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to the new life of grace."[2]

NEW LIFE/NEW CREATION

One is to live a new life because one is now a "new creation" from God in Christ Jesus. Prior to the rebirth, one is dead in sin. What does the "new life" mean to you? What does a "new creation" in Christ mean to you? The "new life" and the "new creation" necessitate a change in one's ethical behavior. Has this "new creation" brought about a change in your way of living? Has this "new creation" in Jesus

brought about a change in your relationship with other people? Has this "new life" and this "new creation" infiltrated your conversations about redemption? Do you now think heaven? Paul says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).[3] All Christians are dead to sin. In other words, sin has lost its influence in their lives. As you reflect back upon your own baptism, what do you remember? The very act of baptism represents dedication to the service of the Trinity—into whose name every believer is baptized (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

Faith Demands Consecration

Christians are made dead to sin. Thus, every believer should rise to a consecrated life just as he or she rose, as it were, from the grave. The very nature of our profession of faith demands purity of life. As you reflect upon your death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, you must come face to face with the question: Has the old life departed? When people see you, do they see Christ? Since you have been raised with Christ in baptism, has there been a change in your lifestyle and your conversation? What do you think about? If you knew that Jesus would come today, would there be a change in your talk and life? In baptism, everyone is confronted with a decision in which one cuts his or her life in two.

At the point of baptism, one, in one sense, rips the old self up by the roots and begins life all over again (**Romans 6:5-10**). Today, we wish to remind Macie Michele Johnson, who was baptized on February 2, 2003, to remember her death and now her new life in Christ. Also, I wish to remind each person about his or her death to sin and his or her new life to righteousness in Jesus in order that one might bring honor to God. Every believer should rise to a sanctified life just as Christ rose from the grace. Has your baptism made a change in your affections and thinking? Is there a difference in your life after your baptism? Are you now dead to sin? Are you now alive to God? One should reread **Romans 6** and reflect upon these words in relationship to one's own walk with God. Are you a servant of sin or are you a servant of righteousness?

Belief and Behavior Go Hand In Hand

What about your behavior? As you reflect upon behavior, do you compare your activities with someone else? Or do you examine yourself in light of God's Holy Word? In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he issued a final warning in the closing of his epistle: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (**2 Corinthians 13:5**). Again, Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, addresses the folly of someone testing himself or herself by someone else's manners: "Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, [5] for each one should carry his own load" (**Galatians 5:4-5**). Have you ever said, "I am as good as he or she is"? We should evaluate ourselves by the Word of God, not someone else's behavior. It is not that Christians cannot emulate good performance by others, but God's children must not use someone else's deeds to justify his or her actions. Two wrongs do not make a right!

What Christians believe and how they behave go hand in hand; one cannot separate conviction and performance. For Paul obligation and belief go together. It is in this vein that Paul admonishes the Corinthians to remember: "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (**2 Corinthian 5:9**). What is your purpose? Is your ambition to please God? When one is born a second time, one's target should always be to satisfy God. For one to give pleasure to God, there must be transformation in one's conduct and thoughts. To the Christians at Colossae, Paul calls attention to the necessity of a change in conduct and thinking. He wants them to reflect upon the implications of their resurrection with Him:

> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

Change in One's Affection/Renovation in One's Thinking

For Paul, the new birth places emphasis on a change in one's affection and a renovation in one's thinking. The Christian not only sets his heart upon things above, but he also thinks heaven. Every believer now is a minister of the reconciliation. It is the duty of Bubba Wilson, Todd Driver, Debra Newton, Gallia Rohm, Curtis Creel, Mickey Brooks, Michael Brooks, Carrol Brooks, Don Snell, and Tammy Salinas to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God. Paul writes: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Every believer should seek to tell the story of the cross, even in the face of opposition. Paul reminds the saints at Thessalonica:

> You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you (**1 Thessalonians 2:1-3**).

MOTIVATION FOR MINISTRY

The Fear of the Lord

As Paul contemplates this ministry of reconciliation, he says," Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men" (**2 Corinthians 5:11**). *The New Jerusalem Bible* translates this verse: "And so it is with the fear of the Lord always in mind that we try to win people over."[4] Do you fear the Lord? But what does it mean to fear the Lord? This is not the kind of fear that a child awaits from his/her parents for disobedience. This fear is the fear that prevents one from desecrating a holy place. It is not so much terror as it is awe and reverence as you serve God. Moses asked the children of God: "And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to

serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (**Deuteronomy 10:12**).

Solomon says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (**Proverbs 1:7**). Again, the Holy Spirit says, "Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil" (**16:6**). Without this cleansing fear, one cannot serve God acceptably. The psalmist says, "The fear of the LORD is pure" (**Psalms 19:9**). Paul, in his **second letter to Corinth**, is trying to persuade the Corinthians of his own "fear of the Lord," that is his to say, his sincerity of admiration and veneration. He wants them to understand his motives. He says in his defense:

> Since we know what it means to fear the Lord, we try to help people accept the truth about us. God knows what we really are, and I hope that in your hearts you know, too. We are not trying to prove ourselves to you again, but we are telling you about ourselves so you will be proud of us (**2 Corinthians 5:11-12**).[5]

Paul reacts over the feedback of others about his actions. He does not want his message injured. He is conscious that any communication is judged in the context of one's character. Paul desires to avoid even the appearance of evil lest his message be rejected. Thus, he lets the Corinthians know:

> If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (**5:13-15**).

Paul insists that there has been only one motivating factor in his service—to serve God and to assist the Corinthians in their relationship with God. Paul lived for the One who died and was raised again. Do you live for the One who died and was raised again? What is your motivating factor in your service? Is it to serve God and the saints in Christ Jesus?

A New Creation

Paul goes right to the heart of the moving motivation of it all—"he died for all." To Paul the Christian is "in Christ" (**5:17**). Every believer died with Christ and arose a new person. The hands of God freshly created him/her in this rebirth. In this newness of life, each person has a set of new standards—the Word of God. In this newness of life, each person has a new agenda—seeking first the Kingdom of God. God wants His children to separate themselves from the world around them. Christians are not to walk in darkness. It is in this regard that Paul admonishes the Ephesians:

> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them (**Ephesians 5:8-11**).

When one is a new creation in Christ Jesus, then there is a new set of priorities. One is careful about his/her activities in the Lord. Again, Paul cautions the Christians at Ephesus:

> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (**5:15-21**).

Every saint is to allow Jesus Christ to work out His will in his or her life. The author of Hebrews expresses it this way:

> May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Hebrews 13:20-21**).

IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS' DEATH

Live for Him

Jesus died that individuals might live *for* Him. Paul captures this concept in his second letter to Corinth, when he writes: "he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (**2 Corinthians 5:15**). As stated above, this truth is also explained in his letter to the Christians in Rome. In this Epistle, Paul lets the Romans know that when Christ died, they, too, died in Him and with Him. He wanted them to understand that in their baptism, they identified themselves with Christ. He says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (**Romans 6:4**). Again, he records:

> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness (**6:10-13**).

When we were baptized, we died in order that we might live *for* God. This is the positive aspect of our identification with Christ. We not only died with Him, but we were raised with Him in order that we might "live a new life" (**6:4**). We, as well as all Christians, are to bear fruit for God's glory: "So, my brothers, you also died to the

law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God" (**7:4**). Jesus died that we might live through Him. Jesus was raised from the dead in order that the "set apart" ones might bear fruit to God. John jots down: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (**1 John 4:9**). Christians should never forget that Christ's death was our death. John Phillips makes the succinct observation about Christ's death:

> His burial was our burial; His resurrection was our resurrection. He not only died for me; He died *as* me! So far as God is concerned, we are already on the resurrection side of the grave and it but remains for us to realize this truth and appropriate it, and the victory is assured.[6]

Every Christian should remember the words of Paul, "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (**1 Corinthians 5:15**). If one has been to the cross and has been saved, how can one spend the rest of his or her life in selfishness? In 1858 Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879), while visiting Germany, saw a painting of the crucifixion with the words underneath: "I did this for thee, What hast thou done for Me?" Following this moving moment, she wrote a poem based on that motto. Shortly thereafter she threw the poem into the fire, but the paper came out unharmed. Her father encouraged her to polish the poem, and it was later published. Christians today still sing this poem set to music. Listen to the words:

> I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed, That thou might'st ransomed be, And quickened from the dead. I gave, I gave, My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me?

CONCLUSION

Christ died that we might live *through* Him and *for* Him and *with* Him. Paul tells the Christians at Thessalonica: "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (**1 Thessalonians 5:10**). What does it mean to you to say that you are a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. Are you conscious of the fact that you are reconciled to God through Jesus? Are you aware of the actuality that you are an ambassador of God? Are you cognizant of the truth of God's righteousness that is imputed to you through Jesus Christ? Listen again as Paul caps off what he says about a new creation:

> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:18-21**).

Christians must do something about what God has done. Christians can share the message of salvation and live a holy life. Needless to say, one's comprehension of

what God has done places a tremendous responsibility on everyone who has heard of God's act of love. Christians have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. We, today, just like the apostle who heard the Good News and accepted the Good News of God's deed, have a responsibility of telling this story to others. Being a Christian means being a missionary. When one understands the cost of redemption, one will become a missionary to everyone he or she knows. Also, when one recognizes the price tag of redemption, one will change his or her affections and renovate his or her thinking.

This appreciation of redemption will result in one's change of his or her ethical behavior. Still, having said this, we need to let men and women know that they do not have to become perfect before they can accept the love of God. Every believer must see his or her work as arising from God. The act of God in and through Christ is the means of reconciling humanity to Himself and to one another. In Christ, we are called upon to unite because of what God has accomplished for us in Christ. God came to men and women in love and suffered for them in Christ so that all—Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free, black and white—could be united with Him and with each other. With God there are no first or second-class citizens. This act of love in Christ binds all men and women together. Charles W. Foreman has captured the very essence of God's act in Christ:

> At last came the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. It came in Jesus Christ. In him men saw God, not just giving commandments to love, but giving *himself* in love. In the cross, men saw not just the sufferings of a thoroughly good man, but the sufferings of God himself for the sake of men. In that man Jesus Christ they saw somehow God acting for man. Instead of men making sacrifices to appease God, as had so long been done, God himself assumed the burden and suffered the consequences of evil for the sake of man.[7]

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[1] William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 87.

[2] Ibid., 84.

[3] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless otherwise stated.

[4] *The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

[5] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

[6] John Phillips, *Exploring Romans* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), 102.

[7] Charles W. Forman, *A Faith for the Nations* in the *Layman's Theological Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 42.

Righteousness of God: Imputed or Earned?

By: Dallas Burdette June 29, 1996

Thrust Statement: **God's righteousness is imputed to man through faith in Jesus.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 1:17; 10:3-4; Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30**[1]

> For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, righteousness that is by faith from first to last (**Romans 1:17**).
>
> Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (**Romans 10:3-4**).

What is the "righteousness of God" in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4**? Is it the righteousness that justifies the sinner or the righteousness of the Christian life? The question is: Does Paul employ the word "righteousness" in the sense of that which is imputed to man or in the sense of that which man performs? Does this righteousness involve one's keeping the commandments of God?[2] Or, is this a righteousness that is outside man? Is the righteousness in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4** imputed or earned?[3] Put another way, how is man placed in a right relationship with God? Is it by imputation or by works? Even though both kinds of righteousness appear in the book of Romans, the question still remains concerning the proper exegesis of the above passages. Since Paul employs the word "righteousness" in both senses, one must exercise discriminating judgment in distinguishing between the various nuances based upon context in which the term is used. One must distinguish between the "righteousness of faith" and "the righteousness of holy living" (sanctification).[4] "Active" righteousness is the fruit of "passive" righteousness. Sanctification (active) is the fruit of righteousness by faith (passive).[5]

In **Romans 1-8**, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. Even though he stresses justification by faith alone, or imputed righteousness, in the **first eight chapters**,

he, nevertheless, addresses the fact that all Christians are servants of righteousness. God is concerned about holiness in the lives of those to whom He has imputed His righteousness. But the focus of the first part of Romans is imputed righteousness, that is to say, how a man is placed in a right relationship with God. Thus, Paul's emphasis is upon "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (**Romans 1:17**). More clearly put, the emphasis is upon the righteousness of God, separate and apart from works of law, imputed to man through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the theme of these eight chapters is: How can a man be justified?-- by works or by faith?

After Paul's emphasis on justification by faith,[6] he demonstrates graphically that holiness is the believer's spiritual worship. Thus, Paul begins chapter twelve with emphasis upon holy living, not for justification, but as the means of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice which is one's worship. Once an individual is free from God's wrath through Jesus Christ, Paul emphasizes the behavior of those who through faith are righteous. Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord (**Titus 2:12-14**).[7] "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness," said Paul (**Romans 6:18**). Those in Christ are "servants of God," therefore, they are to "have fruit unto holiness" (**Romans 6:22**).

But the word "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosuvnh) in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4** is much more comprehensive than personal holiness or even correct teaching.[8] This righteousness is the righteousness of the new aeon -- the righteousness of God[9] revealed through Jesus Christ. When Paul articulates the "righteousness of God" in **Romans 1:17** and Romans **10:3-4,** he is not using the word "righteousness" as an activity on the part of man but as an activity on the part of God. Perhaps to better clarify, God gives us Christ as "righteousness." This "righteousness" is not the "righteousness of law," but the "righteousness of God." The law of God can never, under any circumstances, be a way of salvation, not even for one "in Christ" (**Romans 7:14-25**). Paul differentiates between the "righteousness of law" and the "righteousness of faith." If one is to have a correct understanding of the "righteousness of God," without law, it is essential that one distinguish between **righteousness** as an **attribute** of godly living and **the righteousness** that is **vicarious**, that is to say, a righteousness that is done for us, not in us.[10] This righteousness ***begins*** with faith and ***ends*** with faith, not good deeds performed, or works of the law, or a correct understanding of Scripture.

Imputed righteousness is entirely outside the behavior of the believer.[11] It is the ***doing*** and ***dying*** of Jesus.[12] Adding anything to this substitutionary work and calling it our righteousness by faith is blasphemy. We work from justification, not to it. Justification is the mother of sanctification.[13] Before justification, man was the "servant of sin," but after justification, he is a "servant of righteousness" (**Romans 6:16-22**).

The Gospel of Jesus and the Life of Holiness

The gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned about right conduct,[14] even as the law is.[15] This is self-evident from Paul's arguments in **Romans, chapter 6**, about "free from sin." No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. It is not in that sense that a Christian is "free from the law." But it is only "in Christ"[16] that the law is fulfilled in us (**Romans 8:4**). This fulfillment is not something accomplished by man, but by God in Christ. Even though

man is "free from sin," nevertheless, he is exhorted to "yield" his "members servants to righteousness unto **holiness (Romans 6:19b**)." Since man cannot keep the law perfectly, Christ's right conduct is credited to man through faith.[17] The gospel is insistent upon man's holiness in the presence of God. The gospel does not do away with law as an expression of God's will. [18]

Paul, in essence, says this very thing in **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." We do not dismiss the law, the gospel establishes it. "To Paul there can be no thought of the law dying. It is not a case of the Christian's decision to regard the law as repealed and nonexistent . . . . Nor can it be said that, with the coming of Christ, the law was outdated and abolished," says Nygren.[19] There is a distinction between the "law dying" and the believer "dying to the law."

In **Romans 7**, Paul specifically states that the believer is "dead to the law" and is "delivered from the law" (**Romans 7:4, 6**).[20] This death to the law is the only way one can escape the "wrath of God." Even though the Christian is "Not under law"; nevertheless, he or she delights in God's law. Paul sets forth the question: "Is the law sin?" (**Romans 7:7**). No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (**Romans 7:12**). The Christian delights in the law of God after the inward man (**Romans 7:22**). Paul not only delighted in God's law, but he also served the law of God. For example, he writes: "with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (**Romans 7:25**). Even though Paul served the law of God, he did not serve the law of God for justification. Christians work not **TO** justification, but **FROM** justification.[21] Paul stresses that God's grace teaches believers to live holy lives:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works (**Titus 2:11-14**).

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ meant to do? What is it supposed to achieve? Is the gospel merely to forgive sinners and deliver them from hell? No! The end of the gospel is to reveal an answer to Job's question: "How shall a man be just with God?" (**Job 9:2**). The business of the gospel is to make persons righteous in His sight, to make people acceptable to God, to enable individuals to stand in the presence of one's Holy God. How does God accomplish this feat? It is only by the fact that one is **in Christ** that one can stand in the presence of a Holy God. Christ has become **for everyone** all that God requires **of one**.

Justification is the central purpose of the Gospel of God. In the gospel, God reveals righteousness apart from law. The "righteousness apart from law" is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness from God does not make void the just requirements of the law; rather it establishes the law's goal.[22] It is this righteousness apart from the law that Paul calls the "righteousness of God." Thus, the status of righteousness which the law sought to bring about is now realized in anyone who accepts Jesus as God's appointed means of salvation. To restate this truth concisely, "the righteousness of God" comes to one through faith in Jesus.

Can a man be just with God through law keeping? No! If one is "under law," any law, Old Testament or New Testament, then, before one can be placed in a right relationship with God, the law of God must be kept perfectly in every respect. James, brother of Jesus, explains this thought in this way: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (**James 2:10**). The law condemns. Under law one is under Wrath (**Romans 5**), Sin **(Romans 6**), Law (**Romans 7**), and Condemnation (**Romans 8**). How can man escape the **wrath** of God, the **dominion** of sin, the **curse** of the law, and the **condemnation**?[23] There is only one way; namely, "in and through Jesus Christ."[24] This is what the gospel is all about. This is the whole glory of the gospel. Why did Paul rejoice in the gospel? He gives us his answer: "For in the gospel (ἐν αὐτῷ ejn aujtw) a righteousness from God is revealed" (**Romans 1:17**).

In one's confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and belief in His resurrection, one receives the "righteousness of God," apart from law. God does not loose the just requirements of His moral law,[25] but he upholds his demands through Jesus. In one's acknowledgment and acceptance of Jesus as God's way of salvation, God imputes,[26] that is to say, credits, to that individual the righteousness of his Son. Where justification is exalted, the law of God is elevated. Justification by faith makes the law and the sinner friends: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (**Romans 7:22**).

Even though Paul expresses his delight in the law of God, he does not delight in the law of God for justification. Why? In **Romans 3:19-20**, Paul sets forth the terrifying aspects of the law. He says that **the law of God shuts every man's mouth**, no man can boast. But the apostle does not leave man in despair; he gives hope to sinful man. Paul reveals how a man can be righteous before a holy God. Immediately, he develops this righteousness from God, apart from law. Paul's assessment of man's situation is full of hope, he writes:

> But now a righteousness from God apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

But Now the Heart of the Gospel

But now is the heart of the gospel of Christ.[27] This **"but now"** is how faith answers the indictment of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—**"but now."** No man ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of his holy law. Well, is there hope for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The Apostle answers these questions. How? **"but now!"** Yes, God's grace provides the righteousness his law demands. The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for man in Christ Jesus. "But now" is man's defense against the curse of law. This is the heart of the gospel.

The gospel tells us of a righteousness from God, a righteousness provided by God, ***in*** and ***through*** our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has satisfied the law of God on man's behalf. He

fulfilled the law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is ***external*** to man, a righteousness that is ***alien*** to man, a righteousness that is ***passive*** to man, a righteousness that is ***imputed*** to man.[28] This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it.[29] But God unfolds it and presents it on display in the gospel of his crucified Son; Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the gospel. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals his way of redeeming sinners and upholding his holiness. Paul poignantly captures this truth when he pens:

> God presented him a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -- he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

IMPUTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Justification by faith is a legal transaction[30] related to God's law and to divine jurisprudence. The idea of imputation (righteousness that is credited to man) is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement (Christ died as a substitute for man).[31] Imputation and substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. The ultimate act of salvation is in the Christ event. Thus, it is fitting to call God's redemptive act in Christ "the righteousness of God." This righteousness is ***furnished*** by God, ***devised*** by God, ***made obtainable*** by God. It is God's salvation from beginning to end. The prophets testify to this event. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:6**)." Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, writes:

> But he was **pierced** for our transgressions, he was **crushed** for our iniquities; the **punishment** that brought us peace was upon him, and by his **wounds** we are healed.
>
> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will **justify** many, and he will **bear** their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he **bore** the sin of many, and **made intercession** for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:5, 11-12**).

Not only is the "righteousness of God" that which belongs to His Son Jesus that comes to every individual through faith, but Jesus is the "righteousness of God." Paul, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3-4**, is not talking about acts of righteousness, or the doing of good deeds, but rather the issue of "imputed righteousness" -- a righteousness bestowed upon man through faith in His Son Jesus. If one is to understand "imputed righteousness," he or she, first of all, must understand how one becomes a sinner before God. Sensitivity to this question will shed great light on how one becomes righteous before God.

Paul speaks of this righteousness as coming from God, not man; he describes it as "God's righteousness." Very succinctly, he writes about "a righteousness from God, apart from law" (**Romans 3:21**). This "righteousness from God" is Christ's faithfulness, truthfulness, and obedience to God's law. These attributes of Christ are ***credited*** to the believer as his own. Paul uses ***credited*** eleven times in chapter four of Romans. The central thought in justification is that, although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (**4:9-19**), God declares him righteous through the ***doing*** and ***dying*** of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our righteousness. Paul aptly stresses the centrality of the gospel: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."[32] Jesus is our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. This is the only means by which sinful man can stand before his God. One can only boast in the Lord, not his works of righteousness. Jesus is "our everything."

ABRAHAM AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Brinsmead captures the essence of imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ when he writes:

> The whole concept of imputation is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement. Imputation and the substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other. . . . God laid our sins on Jesus Christ by imputation. He "was numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12). This is how He was Amade...to be sin for us." There was nothing in Him worthy of death. But He was condemned by the righteous judgment of God, for He had been made to be sin by imputation. In this sense it was right that Christ should suffer the wrath of God. He had to be treated *as if* He were a sinner.[33]

Paul expounds upon the principle of justification by faith by using Abraham to prove that the "righteousness of God" is ***credited*** to man "through faith." Since the Scripture is its best interpreter, one should look to "it is written" for one's understanding of that which God reveals to His people through the Holy Spirit. Note the following Scriptures:

> Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation (**Romans 4:4**).
>
> ...his faith is *credited* as righteousness (**Romans 4:5**).
>
> David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works (**Romans 4:6**).
>
> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him (**Romans 4:8**).
>
> It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith (**Romans 4:13**).

> The words "it was ***credited*** to him" were not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness -- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (**Romans 4:24**).

Again, one should reflect upon Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he contemplates the "righteousness of God." For example, "**Christ Jesus** . . . **has become** for us wisdom from God -- that is, **our righteousness**, **holiness** and **redemption**" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). This "**righteousness of God**" is **JESUS CHRIST**. Remember, "the Scriptures foresaw," says Paul, "that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you" (**Galatians 2:8**). Paul very vividly describes the "righteousness that is by faith":

> Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says:...The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (**Romans 10:5, 6, 8, 10**).

One must be careful that he or she does not fall into the same error of the Jews, that is to say, seeking to establish one's own righteousness through law keeping. It is not uncommon for believers today to seek justification through "absolute perfection" in knowledge and obedience (sanctification) to God. One may be mistaken about many things taught in the Scriptures, but one's salvation is NOT contingent upon absolute freedom from error in knowledge nor is one's salvation conditional upon perfect obedience to law. One's salvation is dependent upon one's acceptance of Jesus, who is God's righteousness, the savior of the world. If the head is righteous, then the body is righteous.

To state more fully, this righteousness is **unattainable** by obedience to any law, old or new, or by merit of one's own initiative, or any other condition than that of faith "in Christ." It ***begins*** with faith and ***ends*** with faith (**Romans 1:17b**). Nygren pinpoints this truth: "Faith is the beginning and the culmination."[34] The man or woman who trusts in Christ becomes "the righteousness of God in Him."[35] One becomes in Christ all that God requires a man or woman to be, all that he or she could never be in-and-of themselves. Thus, everyone must conclude that a person is justified "freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Freedom from **wrath**, **sin**, **law**, and **condemnation** is ***in*** and ***through Jesus*** *Christ* our Lord (**Romans 5:21b**; **6:23b**; **7:25b**; **8:39b**). Is it any wonder that Paul writes "Therefore having been justified by faith, peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Faith alone"[36] means that the righteousness of God's provisions is everything necessary for one's salvation. It is "from faith to faith," said Paul (**Romans 1:17**). Paul stresses, as stated above, forcefully this truth with double prepositions: it ***begins*** with faith and it ***ends*** with faith. Robert Brinsmead correctly states:

> **Imputation.** The words *impute, reckon, account, credit* all come from the Greek word *logizomai,* which is used eleven times in Romans 4. The believer has righteousness imputed or credited to him (Rom. 4:6). This

> is "the righteousness of One," even Christ (Rom. 5:18, KJV). Paul is not talking about the believer's experience but about his status in the judgment of God. Imputation of our sins to Christ (Rom. 5:19-21) and of His righteousness to us deals with legal realities. Neither the imputation of sin nor of righteousness means a change of character of the object. But it does change the way the object is regarded. Surely Calvary is the proof of this.[37]

SINNERS THROUGH ADAM

To appreciate more fully the subject of righteousness through imputation, one must reflect upon Paul's analogy between the first Adam and the second Adam (**Romans 5:15-19**). One does not become a sinner because of something that happens within; but one is a sinner because of something that took place outside man in another person, namely, Adam. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (**Romans 5:15-19**). Adam was the first father. He stood as the federal head. The whole human race is constituted in him. When Adam fell, it was the same as if every man had fallen.[38] Paul maintains that through one man (Adam), death reigned, and through one man (Jesus), the gift of righteousness reigns:

> But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as **through the disobedience** of the one man the many were made sinners, so also **through the obedience** of the one man the many will be made righteous (**Romans 5:15-19**).

In Romans 5, Paul develops imputation from Adam as well as imputation from Christ. God reverses the fall of Adam by giving the human race another Father, as it is written:

> For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**).[39]

Just as the whole race is comprehended in Adam, so God comprehends all faithful humanity in His Son. Jesus became the new Head, the Representative, the Father of the fallen race. Robert Brinsmead captures the essence of the righteousness of God, when he says, "Jesus was the total outlay of heaven' treasure, the accumulated love and wealth of eternity, the totality of God's righteousness."[40] Paul burst forth in rapturous language when he writes: "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us

wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). In Paul's second letter to Corinth, he captures the very essence of the gospel:

> That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:19a, 21**).

JESUS: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Again, one must ask the question: What is this righteousness? **IT IS JESUS**! God's righteousness is revealed historically and transacted in the Christ event.[41] Paul makes abundantly clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. The believer is **credited** with Christ's righteousness because Christ obeyed, even unto death. In the time of Christ and the apostles, the Jews, as a whole, did not comprehend this external righteousness that is credited, or imputed, to man. They went about to establish their own righteousness rather than submit to God's righteousness, which is Jesus.[42] When one speaks of the righteousness of God, he or she is addressing the subject of justification by faith. In analyzing justification by faith, Paul discusses the relationship of the law to the believer. The believer is dead to the law. The believer is free from law. Paul argues that "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**). But the Jews were pursuing righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Thus, Paul deals with this illegal use of the law, namely, a pursuance of righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Paul further elaborates this issue in his epistle to the Galatians. He asserts that:

> A man is **not** justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**Galatians 2:16**).

Paul's concern for the Jews lies in the fact that they were going about to establish their relationship to God upon their works rather than upon the work of Christ. He does not reject obedience to the law,[43] but rejects righteousness by works, that is, the attempt to use the law to put God in one's debt. Paul writes: "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (**Romans 3:20**). From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person not guilty. From the positive viewpoint, he declares him righteous. Again, Paul exclaims: This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:2-24**).

Although all are sinners, God declares everyone who puts his trust in Jesus **not guilty**, but **righteous**. This legal declaration is valid because Christ lived a perfect life and died to pay the penalty for our sins; thus, His righteousness is credited to man. This imputed righteousness is the central theme of Romans, as Paul expresses this truth in **1:17**: "For **in the gospel** a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: `The righteous will live by faith.'"

CONCLUSION

How does God justify the ungodly? Brinsmead goes right to the heart of the matter when he says,

> How can a Judge who is supremely just justify the ungodly? Paul's answer is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is true that the believer is wholly a sinner in himself and will in this life continue to fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23)). But God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus. And on this basis God can declare him righteous and treat him as if he were righteous.[44]

For one to be justified, one must be obedient to the faith (**Romans 1:5; 10:3; 10:16**). But what does it mean to be "obedient to the faith"? What does it mean to "submit to the righteousness of God"? What does it mean to "obey the gospel"? All three phrases are synonymous. It means to submit yourselves to the "righteousness" made available through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The Jews sought a salvation through law keeping, that is, "righteousness by law," rather than salvation through faith in the Christ event, that is, "righteousness through faith." The Jews, as a whole, did not "obey the gospel." To state more forcefully, they did not submit to God's way of salvation--Jesus.

Paul's argument is that man's righteousness cannot be built from below, but from above. God's imputed righteousness is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ. The only righteousness is the righteousness of faith. "A righteousness of God IN IT [gospel] is revealed from faith to faith" (**Romans 1:17**). Paul employs, as mentioned above, two prepositions to emphasize the faith principle: ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, "**from** faith **to** faith"). Paul drives home the point of one's justification -- this righteousness begins with faith and ends with faith. It is God's righteousness, not man's righteousness through compliance with the teachings of God. The following passage is worth quoting in full, showing as it does the proper definition of faith:

> We must be careful, however, about our definition of faith, and what faith does, and where faith comes in. Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. That is where that teaching I have just been denouncing goes wrong; it says that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's Cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as

> righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which links us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.[45]

The righteousness of God, in **Romans 1:17** and **10:3**, is the righteousness ***prepared*** by God, ***made available*** by God, and ***imparted*** by God to man through faith. In these Scriptures Paul is writing about the righteousness that God declares to man, not man's holiness through holy deeds. The paramount thought is the state of being "in the right," not by works, but by Jesus. The only way man can be in union with God is through God's anointed One. No amount of good deeds can put a man right with God, only Jesus can accomplish this performance. How does God's righteousness come to man? The Scripture says "through faith."[46] Faith always points away from itself, it rest for salvation on Christ's union with God Faith is the channel or instrument through which God's righteousness is imputed to the believer.

The law is **not** the answer to the problem of sin, but ***Jesus is***. The law of God is not life, but ***Jesus is***. Grace bestows mercy, but law demands death. The written code demands death, but the Spirit gives life. It is Christ or law, not Christ and law. The Christian is not under law, but under grace. The Christian still delights in the law of God. The believer still serves the law of God, but not for justification. Paul argues the ethical implications of the law in Romans:

> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (**Romans 6:12-18**).

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1. All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

2 Although Christians are justified by "faith alone," not faith and works; nevertheless, Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord. Paul writes that the grace of God: "Teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (**Titus 2:12-14**). Again, he pens: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (**Romans 6:18**). Righteousness of faith always leads to righteousness of life. Holiness is the legitimate fruit of the righteousness of faith and the proof that faith is the genuine article (**James 2:14-18**). Sanctification is not optional for the believer. One cannot be saved by sanctification, but one cannot be saved without it. A person who is dead to holiness is not righteous by faith. The gospel of "free justification" saves the believer to holiness. Alister E. McGrath, ***Justification by Faith*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 57, says: "A distinction is made between *justification* and *sanctification* (or regeneration): the former is the work of God outside us, the latter his work within us."

3 "Imputed" is from λογίζομαι (logizomai, "reckon, calculate, take inventory, count, consider") and is employed by Paul 34 times out of a total of 41 times in the New Testament. The Greek word is an accountant's word. In other words, God "credits" righteousness to believers through faith, not through law.

4 Jerry Bridges, ***Transforming Grace*** (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 102, captures the essence of "sanctification," when he writes:

> Sanctification, or holiness (the two words are virtually interchangeable), is essentially conformity to the moral character of God. We normally think of sanctification as progressive, as an inner change of our character whereby we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ. That is certainly a major part

> of sanctification, but that is not all of it. Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more. The first is the result of the work of Christ for us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

5 For an excellent discussion concerning "active" and "passive" righteousness, see Robert Binsmead, ***Righteousness of God***, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 9-25, 57-74.

6 Justification means to declare righteous, not to make subjectively righteous. Justification by faith in Jesus the Messiah changes our relationship to God, but justification is not a change in our moral state. **Justification is what God does for us.** Justification does not indicate a change in us, but it does constitute a change in the way God views us. Justification must not be merged with sanctification. One ***must not*** shift the ground of salvation from the vicarious righteousness of Christ to the personal righteousness of the believer -- vicarious means it is done for us, not in us. It is by faith that the sinner accepts the vicarious atonement of Jesus, that is to say, Jesus as the righteousness of God. Yes, justification is by "faith alone," but sanctification is NOT by "faith alone." "Faith alone" means that the righteousness of God's arrangement is everything essential for redemption. Living a life of purity depends on faith, but not faith alone.

7 See Robert Brinsmead, ***Sanctification*** (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980, 7, where Brinsmead expresses himself most forthrightly in his comments on sanctification:

> We have taken a strong stand for the Pauline doctrine of justification by an outside-of-me righteousness as opposed to the subjectivism of the current religious scene. But Paul's doctrine of justification by faith did not do away with the law. It merely put the law in its right place (Rom. 3:31). Our purpose is not to exalt justification and degrade sanctification. We want to put sanctification in its proper place so that we can give it the great emphasis it deserves.

8 Some Christians relate these two passages to a so-called worship service. In other words, if one utilizes individual cups in the Lord's supper, instrumental music in Sunday morning worship, Sunday school for different ages, orphan homes, Bible colleges, etc., it is argued by some that one is not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God if one adopts any of the above practices. Thus, the "righteousness of God" is identified with correct mental understanding of the Scriptures, not the righteousness made available by God through faith in Jesus.

9 It is called the "righteousness of God" because His grace provides it. The "righteousness of God" is God's redemptive act in Christ.

10 See Robert Brinsmead, ***The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption***, Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980, where Brinsmead draws attention to this great truth:

> The Bible makes clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. Sin was dealt with, Satan was defeated, death was destroyed, and redemption was accomplished. This mighty action of God, which transcends every other action for all eternity, was not a work done in us (moral). It was a work done outside us in the person of Christ (legal).

11 Throughout **Romans 3** and **4**, Paul examines righteousness being imputed rather than the believer's holiness of life. On the other hand, in the next four **chapters** (**5-8**), he turns his attention to the life that righteousness by faith demands. In chapters three and four, He sets forth the righteousness of God as something objective to us, reckoned to us, or set to our account; therefore, this righteousness is not internal work.

12 In **Romans 1:17a** Paul speaks of faith. In writing about faith, Paul uses the double expression "**through** faith **for** faith" (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin). This is Paul's way of excluding the thought of a righteousness of one's own, attained through law and works. By this joining of phrases (**from** faith **to** faith) the last crumb of works-righteousness is uprooted.

13 Sanctification means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service (**2 Corinthians 6:17**). Sanctification is a continual cleansing and separation from sin; it is a continual growth in the attributes of the divine character. See also Brinsmead, ***Sanctification***, 13, where Brinsmead aptly stresses the centrality of sanctification:

> So, on the one hand, sanctification means separation from sin, from unholy fellowship, from the abomination of the heathen, from the world and its allurements, from the ways of the ungodly. And, on the other hand, it means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service.

14 The reformers stressed the distinction between the legal and moral aspects of redemption, that is, between justification and sanctification. Paul negates law as a method of salvation, not as a valid demand of a righteous God. See Brinsmead, ***The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption***, 27. Where he captures the legal and moral aspects of redemption: "Any reformation of life and conduct not based on God's law is fraud. Jesus said, 'If you love Me, you will obey what I command' (John 14:15). While the law points us to Christ, Christ points us back to the law."

15 Since the subject of justification by faith is not very well understood by many Christians, it is necessary to use the literary technique of "repetition" to instill this vital teaching into the hearts of God's people. In fact, there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

16 To be "in Christ" is to be beyond the pale of the law's power. It is to be free from the "curse of the law" (**Galatians 3:10-13**). The person that is outside the realm of faith, that is, Christ, the realm of the law still rules. To be under law is to be under "wrath," "sin," and "condemnation." This is where the "**good news"** comes into play. Paul writes: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (**Romans 10:4**).

17 Christ fulfilled the covenantal stipulations of the Ten Commandments; Christ kept God's commandments (**John.15:10**); He fulfilled the law (**Matthew. 5:17**); He was obedient (**Philippians 2:5-9**; **Hebrews 5:7-9**); The obedience of Christ to the law of God constitutes His righteousness. The obedience of Christ was consummated in His death on the cross (**Philippians 2:8**). One might also say that Christ's act of atonement is the righteousness of Christ.

18 See **2 Timothy 3:16-17**: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

19 Anders Nygren, ***Commentary on Romans*** (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1967), 272.

20 The Greek text states: "you were put to death (ἐθανατώθητε, ejqanatwvqhte) to the law" (**verse 4**), and "we were discharged (κατηργήθημεν, kathrghvqhmen) from the law" (**verse 6**).

21 Brinsmead, ***Righteousness of God***, 106.

22 See **Romans 3:31**: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." See Brinsmead, ***Sanctification***, 8, where he correctly says: "We want to make clear that justification by faith alone is not an alternative to personal holiness but the only basis for it."

23 I am indebted to Anders Nygren for calling attention to these concepts in his ***Commentary on Romans***.

24 Paul concludes **chapters 5, 6, 7**, and **8** with "in and through Jesus." Chapter 5 is "**through** Jesus" (**verse 21**); **chapter 6** is "**in** Jesus" (**verse 23**); **chapter 7** is "**through** Jesus" (**verse 25**); **chapter 8** is "**in** Jesus" (**verse 39**).

25 Jesus told His disciples:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish (καταλῦσαι) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (**Mt. 5:17-19**).

26 In the New Testament, this doctrine of "imputation" is given far-reaching attention. It is alluded to in **Romans 4:6-25** concerning Abraham's faith and his justification. Also, Paul mentions this in his second letter to Corinth: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not **counting** men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). James also makes notice of "imputed righteousness" when he writes: "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was **credited** to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (**James 2:23**). This word appears over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible--examples are**: Leviticus 7:18**; **2 Samuel 19:19**; **Psalms 32:2**.

27 I am grateful to Dr. Lloyd Jones for much of my insight concerning justification by faith. The late Dr. Jones, one of the ablest and most respected Bible expositors of the twentieth century, wrote several volumes on Romans. For an illustration of his ability to express clearly the teachings of Romans, see D. M. Lloyd Jones, ***Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 27 where he says:

> 'But now'? This is the essence of the Christian position; this is how faith answers the accusations of the Law, the accusations of conscience, and everything else that would condemn and depress us. These are indeed very wonderful words, and it is most important that we should lay hold of them and realize their tremendous importance and their real significance.

28 Christian writer Leon Morris has penned some compelling words that need to be heard. See Leon Morris, ***The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*** (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1983) 187, where he says:

> An important idea in the New Testament is that righteousness may be imputed. There are grounds for imputation in an Old Testament passage, that in which we read, 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' (Gn.15:6). This presents a problem to some modern people, because we so firmly believe that righteousness is an ethical quality. It is 'being good'. In that sense it is nonsense to talk about righteousness being imputed. Everyone who aspires to this kind of righteousness must merit it for himself, by right living. It cannot be 'credited' or 'reckoned' or 'imputed' to him other than in some fictitious and fanciful sense. But when we see righteousness as basically legal, as 'right-standing', it is another matter. A standing or status can be conferred. The narrative says that God conferred this status on Abraham because of his faith. Paul uses this as his classic example of justification by faith. Abraham received his 'right-standing' not on account of any meritorious action but simply because he trusted God.

29 Peter writes about the angels' intense desire to know something about this salvation:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **Even angels long to look into these things** (**I Peter 1:10-12**).

30 See Brinsmead, ***The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption***, 21, where he points out that:

> The atonement was a satisfaction made to the divine law (legal) as well as a demonstration of God's love to change our hearts (moral). Salvation consists in a change in our standing before the law, which is called justification (legal), as well as a change in our state, which is called sanctification (moral).

31 The following extract from Brinsmead, ***Sanctification***, 52, may explain more clearly the substitutionary work of Christ:

> The work of the Second Person of the Godhead was *substitutionary*. He lived for us a sinless life. He stood in our place in the judgment of God and was wounded for our transgressions. He rose again for our justification. And as our Representative, Substitute and Surety, He now presents the merits of His life and death on our behalf in the presence of the Father. These glorious redemptive acts are substitutionary. They were done for us. They were done outside us and without our effort or aid.

32 **First Corinthians 1:30-31**.

33 Robert Brinsmead, ***Righteousness byFaith*** (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA., 1980), 87.

34 Nygren, ***Commentary on Romans***, 78.

35 **Second Corinthians 5:21**: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

36 By "faith alone" I mean justification **through faith on account of what Christ accomplished for mankind** through His atonement. Man is passive and God is active in one's justification. The righteousness that God imputes to man through faith is "alien righteousness," that is, it is something given to man **in** and **through** Jesus Christ. God offers man salvation as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One is reconciled to God in and through Jesus. Faith is the earthen vessel, or channel, that conveys the treasure of Christ to sinful man.

37 Robert Brinsmead, ***The Pattern of Redemptive History*** (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA, 1980), 45.

38 For an excellent and insightful analysis of the two aeons, see Nygren, ***Commentary on Romans***, 16-37.

39 See also **Romans 10:1-17**. Jesus is God's way of Righteousness, not works!

40 Robert D. Brinsmead, ***Justification***, 29.

41 Robert Brinsmead seems to have fully assessed the Christ event. See Robert Brinsmead, ***Justification*** (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 63, where Brinsmead captures the Christ event:

> In no sense is God's gift of justification something done in man. We may correctly say that the righteousness of God in the Christ event is communicated to the believer by *imputation* (Rom. 4), but it is scandalous to say that it can be communicated to us by *impartation* (infusion). The righteousness of God is a once-for-all event which took place two thousand years ago. Even God Himself cannot reenact it outside of us, to say nothing of doing it in us. But what Christ did He did as our Substitute. Therefore, His life was really our life, and His death our death. God counts them as ours. That is what justifies. Or to put it another way, what He did He did as our Representative, so that we lived and died and rose again in Him.

42 See **Romans 10:1-3**. The Jews sought justification through obedience to law, not Jesus as God's way of salvation. It is not uncommon for Christians also to seek their "own righteousness," or justification before God, through complete understanding of the Word of God, not Jesus as God's appointed means of right-standing. Many Christians have a zeal for legitimate-standing before God, but not in agreement to God's plan of imputed righteousness based upon faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Today, among many believers in the Messiah, righteousness is pursued by exactness in knowledge and by perfection in obedience to a so-called "new law," that is to say, the New Testament Scriptures. Flawlessness in knowledge is the battle cry; but freedom from error is not a condition of salvation, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by attainment to an assured ratio of knowledge, else all men would be damned. One is not saved by accomplishment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ. It is by belief of facts related to Him and not by grasp of abstract truth that one is justified before God. One's justification before God is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When Christians postulate a program of justification by knowledge, then, they hang themselves on the very gallows they have constructed to rid themselves of others, unless they are prepared to make themselves even more ridiculous by affirming they know as much as God.

43 No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. Every believer is "free from the law," but not above the law, see **Romans 7**. The law is given by God, and is an expression of His holy will. McGrath, ***Justification by Faith***, 117, is especially helpful in this area when he writes:

> The gift of our justification lays upon us the *obligation* to live in accordance with our new status. We are ***made children*** of God through our justification as an act of free grace -- and now we must act in accordance with this transformation. The slogan 'Become what you are!' neatly summarizes this situation and encapsulates the essence of Pauline ethics with some brilliance. In justification we are made to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:15-16): therefore we must shine out as lights in a dark world, as a city on a hill (v. 14; Phil. 2:15). Our justification brings about a new obedience -- an obedience that would not be conceivable before our justification and that ultimately rests on the grace of God.

44 Brinsmead, ***Righteousness by Faith***, 76.

45 D. Martin Lloyd Jones, ***Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification, 120.***

46 See **Romans 4:5**, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Again, **Romans 5:1**, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ." Finally, **Romans 3:22**, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ

The Spirit of Toleration for Differences

Scripture Reading: Romans 14 and 15; 16:17

Romans 16:17 is employed by many Christians to justify their separation from other Christians who do not espouse the same interpretation advocated by their particular fellowship. This Scripture is utilized by many zealous believers in a way that is the very opposite of what Paul intended by his remarks. Frequently, Christians are so use to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that they no longer look at the intent of the author. In the analysis of any passage, one must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to the Christian community. The traditions of one's particular heritage make it difficult, if not almost impossible to study the Word of God objectively. Isolated Scriptures do not stand alone. When one seeks to understand any Scripture, one must consult the context, that is to say, the larger portion of Scripture in which a passage occurs.

Paul, as he concludes this Book, issues a warning to the believers "to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned" (**16:17**, NIV). Who were the ones causing divisions? Who were the ones putting obstacles in the way of unity? What was the teaching they had learned? An answer to these questions must be learned from the context, especially **chapters 14 and 15**.

Before proceeding to an examination of the exegetical evidence in seeking to grasp the significance of this passage toward unity of God's people, it is necessary to point out what it is not. For example, almost all fellowships within the Churches of Christ apply the "the teaching you have learned" to their particular interpretation of the Scriptures. Generally this teaching, by many believers, is associated with *a cappella* singing, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, wine only, manner of distributing the bread in the Lord's Supper—break or pinch, kitchens in the church building, women leading in prayer in the assembly, and so on. This Scripture (Romans 16:17) is claimed by each distinctive fellowship as its own property in order to give validity to

withdrawing from every believer who does not subscribe to its own exclusive teachings.

The objective of this essay is to assist individuals not to approach the text with strong subjective biases, that is to say, to view the text through colored glasses. As one seeks to understand **Romans 16:17**, one must ever be conscious that the process of meaning to application is like the flow of a river. It is possible for the interpreter to miss the meaning of a passage if he/she fails to observe the flow of the context. The immediate context supplies a clue to the particular narrative found in **16:17**. **Romans 14-16** must be read together if one wishes to arrive at a correction interpretation of this frequently abused passage.

Chapter fourteen begins with the admonition: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**14:1**). Again, Paul asks the question: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (**14:4**). Then he adds: "To his own master he stand or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**14.4**). Once more, he instructs: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mine" (**14:5**). This chapter deals with differences within the congregation. Some individuals were correct in their understanding, but some were wrong. How were they to react toward these differences? They were to exercise the spirit of toleration for differences.

The next **chapter (15**) begins with the warning: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (**15:1**). Then Paul prays that "May the Go who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**15:5-6**). What was Paul's rationale for such directions? Listen to him once more: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**15:7**). What is the "teaching" in **Romans 16:17**? It is the teaching of a spirit of toleration for differences. If one is not willing to abide by that instruction, then Paul says, "watch out for those who cause division" (**16:17**).

Watch Out For Those Who Cause Division

Thrust Statement: **Paul teaches toleration for imperfection in knowledge.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 16:17**

The exegete who is doing his or her work properly is forever asking the question: But what is the point? What is the author driving at? That is, one is always raising the question of the author's intent. . . . Further, one is also wary of over-exegeting—for example, finding something that would stagger the author were he informed someone had found it in his writing, or building a theology upon the use of . . . discovering meaning in what was not said.[1]

One of Paul's statements toward the close of his epistle is one of the most abused Scriptures within Christendom by many sincere Christians. This statement is: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (**Romans 16:17**).[2] This Scripture is cited in order to justify separation from other believers who do not fall in-line with the so-called faithful brothers. Within the Churches of Christ there are approximately twenty-five or more divisions, each claiming this verse as its own unique property. Each faction clobbers the other group in order to demonstrate to the church and to the world that they will not tolerate dissent from the status quo.

Christians today are battling one hundred and fifty years of tradition. Many Christians are so indoctrinated with a particular party that they can no longer distinguish between custom and the word of God. Jesus, when He came on the scene, also confronted at least one hundred and fifty years of beliefs as advanced by the religious leaders. They, too, could no longer differentiate between their practice and the word of God. There are many traditions that exist within Christendom. But this essay is concerned with one particular denomination—the Churches of Christ. Many Churches of Christ wrench this Scripture out of context to support their castigation of other saints.

Just how should one interpret **Romans 16:17**? How should one explain this passage? What does the words "watch out for" (skopei'n, skopein) convey in this context? The KJV translates the Greek word skopein as *mark*, and this rendition is relied upon for the various clandestine operations in which Christians are thrown out of the synagogues. Still, there are many questions that need to be answered in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of Paul's admonition. This Scripture is normally employed by religious journals within the Churches of Christ to rationalize their actions of condemnation. Various Churches of Christ cite this verse against those who participate in Sunday school, individual communion cups, Bible colleges, bread-breaking, bread-pinching, wine, grape juice, acapella music, instrumental music, and so on. In the observance of the Lord's Supper, if one breaks the bread rather than pinches the bread, then both groups will cite **Romans 16:17** to lambaste the other with the epithet: Division Makers. This legitimate statement of Paul is utilized to force subjection to a meticulous brand of orthodoxy. And those that do not conform to the traditional views advanced by a hard-to-please interpretative community are disenfranchised from their fellowship.

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 16:17

This essay is an analysis of the traditional understanding of **Romans 16:17** as well as an exegesis of the real intent of the statement by Paul. Unless one remembers that godly teachers have simply passed much of their theology on to them, then it is much more difficult to see the text as a window through which one can peer into the historical period. The inherited commentary on **Romans 16:17** is employed by many Christians to explain away their behavior of alienation from other believers. The traditional position, so it appears, is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, to the effect that the reading of the text is upon the basis of one's own theological urgencies, not upon Paul's intended meaning. This "handed down" view is associated with Dub McClish in The Eighth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship. McClish asserts:

> This passage emphasizes the dependence of true unity upon doctrine. The concept of the possibility of scriptural unity on any basis that ignores or forfeits doctrinal truth must be rejected. There can be no heaven-oriented unity in the climate of doctrinal diversity. Scriptural unity surely involves mutual love between the parties concerned, but it requires far more than mere love. This passage states it plainly: where doctrines that differ from and are contrary to THE DOCTRINE are taught and received, the result is not unity, but "*divisions and occasions of stumbling.*" Such statements as "*It is not doctrine that unites us, it is love*," are not only unscriptural, they are totally anti-scriptural. The content of Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of "*unity in diversity.*"[3]

The phrase—"doctrine"—as employed by McClish is in essence whatever he believes about certain Church of Christ dogma. Each fellowship—approximately twenty-five in number—interprets "doctrine" or "teaching" differently. The various orthodox bodies can never agree on what the "teaching" is that Paul addresses in this

epistle to Rome. In this same vein of reasoning, Homer L. King (1892-1983), former editor of *Old Paths Advocate*, wrote an article in 1936 to condemn men like McClish for not abiding in "the teaching you have learned" (**Romans 16:17**).[4] King wrote an article to justify his separation from Christians who use individual communion cups in the communion and participate in Sunday school.

King entitled his article, "Avoid Them." This heading is taken from the concluding remarks of Paul in this passage: "Keep away from them." With his mental concept of what it was all about, he had no choice other than to promote rejection of other believers who refused to conform to his beliefs associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion. What had King learned from his misguided teachers? He learned that one should not use individual cups nor participate in Bible study classes for various ages.

This essay by King had such an impact upon this movement that the current editor, his son, republished this article forty-six years later (February 1982) and again in January 1992. The *Old Paths Advocate* (*OPA*) still uses the logic of King in their interpretation of **Romans 16:17**. This Scripture is called forth to condemn men like McClish, but, on the other hand, McClish employs this Scripture to clobber men like Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, as cited above by McClish—"Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of "*unity in diversity*."

McClish and King—even though in different religious parties or interpretative communities—employ the same Scripture with the same devastating result against those who would dare to differ with their interpretative community. King's sectarian spirit also comes through loud and clear as he "hauls over the coals" those with whom he disagrees:

> "What shall I do," some one inquires, "when we have a preacher or teacher present, who is not quite sound?" Let him be a good listener, until, if ever, he declares his loyalty. The same is true of those, whom you do not know. "They will not say anything about our differences in their teaching," says one. How do you know? If not publicly, they will privately, and beside you are not obeying the command given by Paul, viz, "'mark them' . . . and 'avoid them'" (Rom. 16:17. Homer L. King, OPA, Sept. 1, 1936.[5]

The above two citations—McClish and King—illustrate the dilemma Christians find themselves involved in whey they disagree with other believers over doctrinal issues. As one peruses the various religious journals, one quickly discovers "editor bishops" and "powerful preachers" lashing out at one another. McClish, for example, denounces what he calls "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" But what is there about this *unity in diversity* practice that is so abhorrent to him and to many other religious teachers? This practice of accepting others with various viewpoints, according to McClish and King, is tantamount to denying that the Bible is the standard of authority. And, as a result of this perception of unity, the wrath of many godly men falls upon the necks of the dissidents—equally godly in their walk with the Lord.

Again, what is this "insidious doctrine" advanced by the late Carl Ketcherside and the contemporary Leroy Garrett? Their concept of unity demands, according to McClish, that **Romans 16:17** be called to the front in order to give so-called biblical validity to his right to "avoid" them. Upon closer examination of the context of **Romans 16:17**, one soon discovers that the arguments advanced by McClish and King do not hold up under closer scrutiny. Christians seldom ask, what does the text mean? For one to assign a meaning to the text that was not in the original meaning is to abuse the text. Both men have distorted the text from its intended meaning, but this falsification does not appear to be deliberate on the part of either person. Every Christian is confronted daily with his theological heritage, his ecclesiastical traditions, his cultural norms, and his existential concerns. Since Ketcherside and Garrett both sensed this aspect of human nature, they both published books under the following titles: *The Twisted Scriptures*[6] and *The Word Abused*.[7]

CARL KETCHERSIDE'S VIEW ON UNITY

Just what did Ketcherside teach about how one maintains a relationship with God? What did he teach concerning *unity in diversity*, which everyone practices—whether conscious or unconscious of such behavior? To be fair to Ketcherside, it seems only appropriate to let him express his own thoughts through his writings. Then, after a perusal of his thoughts, one can more fully grasp either the correctness or incorrectness of McClish's allegations about the so-called "insidious doctrine." Ketcherside understood that a mistake of the mind was not necessarily as a result of a dishonest heart. One can be honestly mistaken, but still be loved by God at the same time (see also **1 Corinthians 8** for a biblical example of how one can be mistaken and still be loved by God).

Ketcherside goes right to the heart of the matter when he expresses his views about misunderstanding of the text: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus."[8] Again, Ketcherside correctly points out: "One who loves the Lord Jesus Christ is not an apostate simply because he cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a party."[9] Once more he uses the following pregnant words to express the futility of advocating unity based upon conformity: "Any attempt to secure unity upon the basis of uniformity of knowledge or conformity in deductive or inferential processes (i.e., doctrinal interpretation) is doomed before it begins."[10]

This odd interpretation of **Romans 16:17** is not just unique to McClish and King; this text is cited by many well-meaning Christians to castigate those who advance the belief of *unity in diversity* and, also, to turn down fellowship with individuals who advocate that freedom from error is not a condition of salvation. Ketcherside sought to lay bare the text itself from traditions and sets forth his reason for espousing *unity in diversity* as the only reasonable position that anyone can champion without going contrary to the word of God and common sense. Note for instance his following explanation for his belief in *unity in diversity*:

> Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by

> grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[11]

Has God made salvation contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge? An answer to this question is an unqualified "no"! Eternal life is not conditioned upon an all-out mastery of the word of God. Does Christian unity call for unqualified perfection in knowledge of the Holy Scriptures? Again, the answer to this question must be "no." The only kind of unity that individuals can share is *unity in diversity*. If pure understanding is essential to eternal life, no one could be saved. It is obvious to the thinking mind that within the Christian community there are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not only did Ketcherside see the foolishness of trying to make unity conditioned upon an out-and-out conformity, but Alexander Campbell also dealt with the absurdity of thinking that unity could be based on anything other than faith in Jesus. Campbell strips away all the extraneous matter and goes right to the heart of the problem of disunity among God's people. Consider the following penetrating analysis:

> Let every sect give up its opinions as a bond of union, and what will remain in common? The gospel facts alone. . . . Men have foolishly attempted to make the deductions of some great minds the common measure of all Christians. . . . It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions. . . . I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ.[12]

Campbell knew that it is redemption through Christ that makes us one, not correct understanding. He refused to eliminate a man from the kingdom of God for a condition of mental deficiency or feeble-mindedness. He accepted all as Christians who acknowledged the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and submitted their lives to Him in conformity to His ethical standards as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

LEROY GARRETT POSTULATES UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Leroy Garrett expresses well the basic problem interpreters encounter by not applying **Romans 16:17** to *unity in diversity*, which is exactly what Paul is teaching. The "teaching" in this passage deals with the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community, not doctrinal conformity before unity. Garrett, too, captures the essence of Paul's admonition to the Romans, when he writes: "The phrase 'contrary to the teachings you received' almost certainly refers to the teaching on *unity*

in spite of differences which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14."[13]

Again, Leroy seems to be right in thinking that "It is clear enough that he is dealing with a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal one."[14] Paul is not saying, "It is my way or no way." The traditional Church of Christ interpretation is the spirit of "no toleration" for differences. This behavior is totally at odds with the context. McClish and King, as mentioned above, deny that Paul is teaching *unity in diversity*. What McClish calls "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*'" is the same teaching expounded by Paul in his first letter to Corinth (**1 Corinthians 8**) and to Rome (**Romans 14—16**). If Paul were here today, he would be rejected on the philosophy of McClish and King.

The practice of excommunicating individuals that dissent from one's assumptions is not new to the Christian world of McClish or the late King. For example, in the fourteen century, John Wycliffe (1330-84) suffered abuse from the church for disagreeing with certain religious practices and beliefs. In the sixteen century, John Knox (1514-72), spent nineteen months as a galley slave for his faith. Then in the seventeen century, John Bunyan (1628-88) spent twelve years in prison (1660-72) for refusing to apply for a license to preach. And, but not least, in the sixteenth century, William Tyndale (1494-1536) was burnt for so-called heresy. What was his heresy? He translated the Bible from Greek into English.[15]

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL PUTS FORWARD UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN HIS PLEA FOR THE SPIRIT'S UNITY

One hundred and sixty-eight years ago (1832), Campbell confronted a religious movement that was split into many warring factions. None could agree on what was essential and what was non-essential for Christian unity among the various denominations. Christians, in his day, as well as our day, sought to make fellowship conditional upon unanimity of agreement upon doctrinal matters. As a result of this kind of mental gymnastics, he observed division on every street corner. He saw Christians throwing one another out of the synagogue because of differences over how to interpret a passage of Scripture.

Romans 16:17 was tossed about in his day as it is presently hurled about in our day. Thus, Campbell, too, dealt with the misapplication of this passage that was utilized to justify separation from other equally God-fearing and sincere followers of Jesus. The amount of space and time taken here to review this particular controversy—*unity in diversity*—although considerable, is easily justified. The following quote from Campbell is a lengthy passage, but it has to be cited in full to appreciate his mature insight—an insight that many today do not possess. Campbell's words are pertinent and relevant for the Christian community that has turned into a war zone.

> The Pope and his angels preached from this text half a century, while Luther, Zwingle, Melanchthon, &c. were exposing the filthiness of the Mother of Harlots. As Luther gave the Pope no quarters, he wreaked his vengeance on

> the Reformers, denouncing them as heretics, schismatics, sowers of discord among brethren, haughty, self-willed, and contumacious dignitaries.
> He learned that lesson from his predecessors, who denounced the Messiah and his Apostles by similar arguments. Jesus was not a good man, for he made division among the people; and the Apostles were heresiarchs, for they turned the world upside down.
> Elijah, too, was a disturber of the peace of Israel; and Daniel greatly marred the harmony of the devout fraternity who paid court to Nebuchadnezzar. In short, from the time that Moses caused divisions in the kingdom of Pharaoh, down to the last Dover Association, this text, "Mark and avoid them that cause divisions," has never been unseasonable amongst the opponents of reform and of change; for as there can be no reformation without change—and as all who preach reformation preach a change, the consequence must be, that those who will not change, must, to justify themselves, denounce the reformers; and no text does this better than this—"*Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them.*"[16]

Christians still herald this text against anyone who seeks to call attention to a reevaluation of one hundred and fifty years of tradition. Just a perusal of the Church of Christ journals reveals the popularity of this text (**Romans 16:17**). If anyone questions the hand-me-down traditions from the forefathers, one hears the epithet—Division Maker. Campbell correctly called attention to an illegal use of this citation to condemn the reformers who sought to bring about change. The religious leaders in Jesus' day could also have quoted this Scripture against Jesus and His apostles—for Jesus and the apostles challenged the traditions of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

TOLERATION AND FORBEARANCE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Two reformers—Ketcherside and Garrett—questioned the traditions of the Churches of Christ and their proof-texting of Scripture to substantiate their divisive spirit. One such Scripture they sought to put back into context dealt was **Romans 16:17**. This passage was used and is still used to hack to death anyone who dared/dares to question the strange and weird interpretation of a distinctive interpretative community. They knew that the odd interpretation attached to **Romans 16:17** violated the general teachings of the New Testament (**Ephesians 4:1-6**) and the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (**John 17**).

Both Garrett and Ketcherside called for forbearance. This is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of *unity in diversity*. McClish's cruel statement against these two men is based upon a faulty interpretation of **Romans 16:17**. *Unity in diversity* demands toleration toward other believers—even with mistaken views. For one to understand more fully the mind-set of Garrett, a citation from him should allow one to enter into his concern over the fracturing of Christ's body, which is sinful. Garrett says,

> It is noteworthy that the apostle would turn to character traits (virtues) in his great appeal for unity in Eph. 4. He first "begs" the believers to lead a life worthy of their calling, which has more to do with their fruit than with their doctrine. . . . Partyism cannot forbear anyone whose teaching or behavior

> threatens it's very existence. . . . One thing is sure, in cultivating the grace of loving forbearance we are acknowledging that unity is something more than conformity or uniformity. Unity by its very nature is diverse, and in Christ we have the cohesive of love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. It is coercion that makes for conformity, but it is forbearance that makes for harmony.[17]

Garrett correctly points out that forbearance fosters harmony, but coercion demands conformity. The party spirit stresses submission. On the other hand, *unity in diversity* allows for leniency and mercy. Again, the words of Garrett are quite revealing as he seeks to explain his understanding of *unity in diversity* in his numerous essays dealing with various aspects of unity among God's people. One wonders if there is any other kind of unity other than *unity in diversity*. It is a truism that individuals can no more think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Garrett offers the following succinct observation: "It is silly to suggest that with all our diversity in degree of maturity, intellect, emotions, and circumstances of life, we can agree on everything or interpret the scriptures in precisely the same way."[18] Garrett continues his astute observation of his teaching on *unity in diversity*:

> All this bugaboo about how wrong the "unity in diversity" concept is only reveals how men can be blinded by Partyism. In the first place, any sane man who merely stops to think knows that there can be no unity except in diversity, for that is what unity means, whether in a family, a country or nature—it is a harmony of diverse parts. . . . But it is imperative that we realize that we are all in Jesus together in spite of these differences; and because we are in Jesus together we are sons of God together and brothers. Thank God, we are brother! We must accept each other as such even if we do meet separately.[19]

Garrett advances the belief that Christians are to receive one another in the same way that Jesus receives them to the glory of God—warts and all. His belief system is patterned after Paul's teaching concerning *unity in* diversity. For example, Paul zeros in on this *unity in diversity* concept in his letter to the Romans:

> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (**Romans 15:5-7**).

Again, what is the context of **Romans 16:17**? This text is the culmination of what Paul stated in **Romans 14** and **15**. Listen to just a few of his remarks from **Romans 14** about his insistence on *unity in diversity*:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**Romans 14:1-4**).

Once more, the writings of Paul to the Corinthians also reveal his insistence on the belief of *unity in diversity*, despite the opposite views of McClish and King. The Corinthians did not have it all together as far as Paul was concerned. Some believers wanted to coerce other believers into conformity. But, Paul sought to nip-in-the-bud the conformity mentality:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ (**1 Corinthians 8:1-12**).

Within every Christian community, there are differences. Paul asserts human weakness when he writes in his summary of what he had just previously discussed in **chapters 8—12**—"For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (**13:9**). As stated above, no two people can anymore thank alike than they can all look alike. For individuals to always see eye-to-eye on every subject or biblical text is not humanly possible. The Christian writer John R. W. Stott has penned some compelling words that need to be heard by every child of God. He captures the very heart of *unity in diversity* when he writes: "Equally devout, equally humble, equally Bible-believing and Bible studying Christians or churches reach different conclusions must be considered secondary not primary, peripheral, not central."[20]

Jack Lewis, a scholar respected within and outside the Churches of Christ, expresses the basic problem over the traditional interpretation of **Romans 16:17** espoused by many within the Churches of Christ: "The obligation, almost universally felt among our preaching brothers, to label other preaching brothers who hold positions thought to be erroneous, rest upon a misunderstanding of **Romans 16:17**."[21] When believers apply this text to other saints who do not concur with their comprehension, one cannot help but wonder if they have not allowed their deep-seated prejudice to

shape their verdict before the evidence is even considered. In other words, their narrow-mindedness negates the possibility of grasping the intent of the text correctly.

Once more, Campbell is called upon since he recognized so well the impossibility of achieving unity based upon opinion. He laid bare the naked truth that salvation is based upon acceptance of Jesus, not correct judgment. The following quote is rather lengthy, but, in spite of its length, it is still worth reflecting upon for its profound truths:

The Apostle says, "There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all." But no where is it said in the sacred book, There is one opinion. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate. . . .

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances is, unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[22]

CONSEQUENCES OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One cannot help but wonder what the real controversy is over concerning the acceptance of *unity in diversity* as a biblical principle. The fear is that this idea of unity opens the door to a wider fellowship than is generally allowed within most Churches of Christ. The nightmare is that this perception of diversity will unlock the door to believers that are not members of the denominational Church of Christ. Today, many religious leaders within the Churches of Christ advance the notion that only those that meet behind the label Church of Christ belong to the Lord's community.

In the nineteenth-century, men such as Barton Stone and the Campbells did not hold such narrow-minded views about the Christian *ekklesia* (commonly translated church). Also, in the twentieth century, men such as Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett also caught a glimpse of what the word *ekklesia* connotes in the New Testament writings. The results of this newfound truth opened the floodgates to the acceptance of other believers—even those not associated with the Church of Christ denomination. One's attitude or understanding of the English word *church* contributes either unity or disunity toward one's perception of *unity in diversity*.

Garrett's consciousness of the meaning of the Greek word ejkklhsiva (ekklhsia, assembly, church) caused him to see a wider meaning than just the ecclesiastical overtones normally associated with the English word *church*. This perception caused him to seek unity among all God's people. Through his writings, Garrett aspires to reestablish a true sensitivity to a more correct definition of the word *church* in light of Scripture. His comments in this area are concise and revealing.

> We use "church" because it is so commonly employed, and it is likely to remain with us. What is important is that we give the term no *institutional* meaning. The church of the New covenant scriptures is nothing more than the body of Christ, consisting of all those who are "in Christ," irrespective of the claims of sects and denominations. . . . It is noteworthy that every reformation effort has sought to restore the integrity of the nature of the church. Luther challenged the hierarchy's claim to be the authoritative church, insisting that the church is the people of God and not simply the clergy. Thus restoring the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Thus emerged "the reformed tradition" which has seen the church as the fellowship of all believers.[23]

Both Garrett and Ketcherside postulated that the people of God are larger than the denominational Church of Christ. Many years before these men came to a proper awareness of the true nature of the *ekklesia*, there were others who had already addressed the correct makeup of the church. For example, Barton Stone wrote: "We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large, for there is one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."[24] Stone considered the various denominations of his day as a part of the "Body of Christ at large." Campbell, too, attempted to restore the biblical concept of the church. He wrote:

> But we have yet a broader, a stronger, and, perhaps, a still more striking and convincing view of the duty of all the individual churches in a province, a state, or a kingdom, to co-operate as one church, in all matters of public interest and property to the whole Kingdom of Jesus Christ in a nation, in an empire, or in the world. This is clearly ascertained from one most palpable and most interesting fact. This fact is, that the word *church*, in the singular number, is, by sacred and apostolic usage, often made to represent all the churches in a nation, an empire, or in the world. It is a term used as a commensurate with the whole body of Christ, or the entire community of all the faithful on earth. Hence, there is but one kingdom of Christ, one body of Christ, or one church of Christ on earth. The word *church*, by reference to its occurrences in the New Testament, indicates the whole Christian community on earth.[25]

Again, Garrett, too, points out with justice: "It is a family that we must come to see the church. It is not an institution or organization, but a family community of brothers and sisters."[26] When one possesses a more accurate understanding of the word *church*, then this awareness will promote the spirit of unity since the body of Christ is one. Within the body of Christ, there will always be variation of opinions concerning doctrinal matters. This is, no doubt, one reason that Paul forces home this

point about the Spirit's unity in the epistle to the Ephesians. Paul carefully enumerates reasons for maintaining the unity created by the Holy Spirit:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**Ephesians 4:1-6**).

Paul's words, "bearing with one another in love" and "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" indicate that diversity existed within that body of believers. As stated earlier, Paul also calls attention to this mixture of beliefs within the congregation at Rome. Since there is only one body, it is imperative that Christians seek to support unity in spite of differences. Diversity allows for defective understanding. For one to be in fellowship with another Christian, this consciousness and practice of fellowship does not indicate total endorsement of the other person's belief system. Christians are one because they have the same Father, not because they have comprehended every Scripture unerringly.

FELLOWSHIP AND PERFECT AGREEMENT

For some, so it appears, before fellowship commences, one's insight of God's revelation must be perfect, at least in what many consider to be essentials. But what are the essentials? The fundamentals vary; the nuts and bolts depend on which party you are aligned with. Without an understanding of *unity in diversity*, one cannot fully grasp the full significance of **Romans 16:17**. Before one embarks upon the context of **Romans 16:17**, it is necessary to reflect upon the distinction between Revelation and interpretation.

Many cannot distinguish between interpretation and revelation itself. The religious leaders in Jesus' day also failed to discern the difference between God's word and tradition. Interpretation is what individuals think God meant by what He said. On the other hand, revelation is what God says. The two are not synonymous. One should never equate interpretation of revelation as the word of God. Is one's connection with God dependent upon complete exactness in knowledge? Or is one's bond with God conditional upon one's acceptance of Jesus as Lord in one's life?

Is justification by faith, or is justification through flawless discernment of God's revelation? Should one make a test of fellowship out of spiritual discernment? Is there a difference between gospel and doctrine, and between faith and knowledge? Is it the gospel that brings one into being? Or is rebirth a result of complete comprehension of doctrine? Is not doctrine for growth and well-being? Can Christians think alike on every subject? Can any two individuals upon earth attain to an identical degree of knowledge about everything at the same point in time? Answers to these questions should assist one in arriving at a better grasp of **Romans 16:17** without being so dogmatic and factious.

One should always read with discrimination in order to pick out the most theologically sound thinkers if one wishes to emulate them in their quest for Christian unity for which Jesus prayed. Just a perusal of the writings of Ketcherside and Garrett makes one conscious that these two men fall into this category of sound thinkers. Both men constantly, in their writings, call attention to context, context, context, and context. It is always context that determines the meaning. Ketcherside has penned one of the most thought provoking articles that cuts through the maze of illogical thinking in order to grasp the very heart of what fellowship is all about. He is perfectly right when he insists that

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[27]

Ketcherside captures the very essence of the life-force of the Roman letter. **Romans 16:17** is the culmination of the previous fifteen chapters. One must not interpret this text in isolation. The above citations from Ketcherside and Garrett are in harmony with the teachings of Romans. One can only conclude from reading the book of Romans that one's level of knowledge is not the determining factor in one's fellowship with God, but rather it is justification by faith. Salvation is a gift. And, since it is a gift, then Christians are to put forth every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF ROMANS 16:17 IN CONTEXT

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[28]

What is the context of **Romans 16:17**? Some of the Romans were basing fellowship upon a correct interpretation of all doctrinal issues—*unity in conformity*. But Paul refutes this position of absolute perfection in knowledge as a condition of fellowship. In **chapters 14** and **15**, he deals with imperfection in knowledge within the Christian community. How should one react to the immature in the faith? How should one react toward those whose belief system was not correct in every detail? In these two chapters, Paul discusses how Christians are to respond to differences within the church at Rome.

Paul goes right to the very core of disagreements and how to deal with the individual whose knowledge is inadequate. This writer (Dallas Burdette) urges each person to stand upon the threshold of the Romans as you read the words of Paul: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**); in other words, God accepted them with "warts and all." Thus, Paul is saying that you are to imitate God in your relationship with one another. But, prior to this statement, he encourages them to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**14:1**).

Now, what happens if an individual refuses to accept the above admonitions and seeks to force his belief on others to the point of division? Paul then summarizes his reaction to the factious person: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (**16:17**). This statement by Paul does not condemn men like Ketcherside and Garrett, but rather, this verse is a rebuke to all Christians who refuse to acknowledge the teachings of Paul in **Romans 14** and **15**. What had they learned? They had learned *unity in diversity*.

This emphasis upon *unity in diversity* is also the subject of the Ephesian letter: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**). This is the same kind of instructions that Paul charges the Christians at Rome to practice: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 15:5-6**).

Disputable Matters in the Roman Church

Without consulting the context of **Romans 16:17**, one can postulate bizarre interpretations. Prior to Paul's appeal "to watch out for those who cause divisions" (**16:17**), he instructs the saints to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**14:1**). The context tends to indicate that some believers wanted to force their so-called correct interpretation (some were right and some were wrong in their understanding) on other Christians. Some, in the congregation at Rome, insisted upon everyone submitting to their views. But Paul says, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (**14:5**). There is a vast difference between "my mind" and "own mind." In other words, one's conviction must be based upon his own conclusions, not someone else's beliefs:

> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin (**14:22-23**).

There was a dispute over the eating of meats and vegetables: "One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (**14:2**). Paul is declaring that no one should create division over his/her personal understanding of meats or vegetables or days. It is in this same vein that Paul writes, "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God" (**14:6**). Paul sets forth the words of the Holy Spirit to

refute the practice of enforcing conformity: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**14:4**). Again, Paul widens this position by reminding them: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (**14:5**). If believers were not willing to abide by this spirit of toleration, then Paul utters,

> I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (**16:17-18**).

Paul's admonition is: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (**15:1**). Those who cite **Romans 16:17** to justify their separation from other believers are the very ones that Paul is warning the believers to keep an eye on. It is also in this same vein that Paul advises Titus: "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (**Titus 3:10-11**). It is very difficult for Christians to apply the Scriptures correctly when it comes to their "pet theories" concerning communion cups, Sunday school, drink element in the Lord's Supper, acappella singing, instrumental music, Sunday collection, and so on. Making allowances for the beliefs of others is a part of the " teaching you have learned" (**Romans 16:17**).

Disputable Matters in the Corinthian Church

The church in Corinth experienced the same difficulties that the church did in Rome. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he addresses the differences within the body of Christ. The problem he faces is the concern of perfection in one's knowledge. This epistle concedes that knowledge of absolute truth is relative. He is not saying that truth is relative, but rather, that one's brainpower of total truth is relative. In other words, no one understands perfectly. Paul tackles the question of flawless knowledge head-on: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (**1 Corinthians 8:2**).

As one reflects upon this statement of Paul, anyone in his/her right mind will concede that this imperfection is knowledge is still with humanity. How many Christians know every thing, as they "ought to know." Why do individuals purchase books to study? Why do Churches of Christ establish educational institutions to train preachers? Is it not because people do not know everything, as they "ought to know." Yet, in spite of this testimonial, Paul admits that knowledge is not totally absent from the minds of men and women: "We know that we all possess knowledge" (**8:1**).

In fact, Paul has to deal with brethren who think that they know it all. Christians sometimes feel that because of their superior knowledge that they are just a "notch above" the others. He calls attention to the dangers that lurk behind the attitude of "I know." Listen to Paul as he cautions the Christians about knowledge: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (**8:1**). Yes, Paul is saying, it is true that we all have knowledge, but knowledge can puff one up. The question that confronts everyone is: Does God know the individual whose knowledge is defective? Is God concerned about

the hearts of men and women? Or, is God just concerned about one being able to cross every "t" and to dot every "i"?

Again, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, reveals the mind of God: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God" (**8:2-3**). Paul is saying that God loves the person whose knowledge is incomplete if he/she loves God. One may not be accurate in his/her thinking on every point, but love is the determinative factor in God's acceptance of that individual: "the man who loves God is known by God" (**8:3**). What Paul is saying to the Corinthians is the same as "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity.*'"

Before concluding this analysis of Paul's thinking in his letter to Corinth, it would be helpful to pursue his line of reasoning for his beginning statements about knowledge being relative. Paul fully grasps the dilemma of perfect knowledge versus one's relationship with God. In this eighth chapter of First Corinthians, he reveals what some of the issues were over:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this (**8:4-7**).

This eighth chapter of First Corinthians is *unity in diversity*. There are very few Churches of Christ that would welcome Paul in their congregations. In fact, there would be very few Church of Christ universities that would allow Paul to teach in their midst. He would be accused of *liberalism* and *digression*. Why? He believed in *unity in diversity*. Are the individuals whose knowledge was deficient about God still brothers in Christ? Should they be thrown out of the synagogue? Are they liberals and digressive? Is God concerned about these persons that still love him, in spite of undersupplied information? What does Paul say about this condition? Listen as he reveals the mind of God:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall (**8:9-13**).

Christians who are not willing to make allowances for imperfection in knowledge for the "weak brother" are the ones to whom Paul speaks in **Romans 16:17**: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep

away from them." Again, *unity in diversity* is the thrust of Paul's discussion of differences in the church at Rome and Corinth and Ephesus. It is appropriate once more to turn to the principles advanced in the writings of Garrett and Campbell.

GARRETT AND CAMPBELL ON UNITY IN DIVERSITY

These two men—Garrett and Campbell—addressed this principle of *unity in diversity* throughout their writings. The principles they advanced—Garrett still advances—was and is based upon the writings of Paul. Hopefully, this repetition may be pardoned here since the mind of man is leavened by the traditions of the church, which prevails in Christendom, by Christians who undermine the teachings of God in this area in order to maintain doctrinal purity of approximately 150 years of ritual. It is fitting to call Garrett to the scene once more to hear his explanation of **Romans 16:17** in context, which analysis has brought the wrath of the established church against him with all the hatred one can muster.

> The phrase "contrary to the teachings you received" almost certainly refers to the teaching on unity in spite of differences which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14. . . . The truth is that we can hold such differences and still be one. This is because we are in the fellowship with Jesus together. It is not doctrines that make us one. . . . Those who insist that we line up on their opinions, or else suffer their wrath and oppression, are really the ones to mark and avoid, in view of the real meaning of Ro. 16:17. [29]

When Christians seek to regulate unity upon unconditional unanimity of agreement, then no unity can exist within the body of Christ. As one peruses the religious journals within the Churches of Christ, one soon discovers that no two people are in total agreement on every doctrinal belief. Campbell, in his consciousness of differences in mental acumen, put it succinctly for all believers:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[30]

Campbell calls attention to something that is already well known. It goes almost without saying that in the body of Christ, there will always be infants, children, young men, and fathers. Every child of God is at a different level of knowledge. The saints are to grow in knowledge and in favor with God. There will never be "one opinion," however much desired. This plea for unity is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" Campbell,

Ketcherside, and Garrett sought to correct the misapplication of **Romans 16:17**, which fostered/fosters division within the camp of God.

CONCLUSION

One of the major objectives of this essay is to assist believers in dropping their sectarian spirit and learning to accept those for whom Christ died and whom He accepted. The question that confronts everyone is: Does anyone have 20/20 vision? When one reads **Romans 16:27** without spectacles, one quickly becomes conscious that the demand for complete agreement in all doctrinal matters is not under consideration, but rather the making of allowances for the weak. Believers are one in Jesus—not because they see every Scripture exactly alike—because they are reconciled to God through the atonement of Jesus. God's children can no more see alike on every subject than they can all look alike.

Paul's letters reveal that salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon trust in Jesus as Lord. He stresses two essential truths throughout the book of Romans: (1) salvation by faith, not by works, and (2) allowances for imperfection in knowledge over issues that do not affect one's salvation. If one does not go along with imperfection in knowledge, then, that person is not adhering to "the teaching you have learned." Absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation—else all men/women would be damned. All error is error but not all error will condemn one's soul—else no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to deliverance from damnation—else all would be lost.

A careful reading of the context of **Romans 16:17** does not violate these basic statements. In this verse, Paul is seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by tolerating the weak. This Scripture is one of the most abused Scriptures within the Churches of Christ. This essay sets forth an interpretation that is based upon the context, not one's presuppositions. In making this judgment, one must not conclude that Christians who misappropriate this text in order to justify their separation from other believers are not Christians. But their sincerity does not make them right.

Ketcherside and Garrett sought to prevent individuals from creating division within the body of Christ by laying bare the naked truth of God's word from the traditions of men. These two men called for men and women to learn how to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down through the centuries. In other words, they wanted God's people not to confuse a habit of interpretation with the text itself. Many family members are so used to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of godly interpreters that any questioning of the traditional interpretation appears to be a questioning of Scripture itself. The hand-me-down practices in the church have made it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible correctly.[31]

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[1] Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 17.

[2] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[3] Dub McClish, "Greetings—Along With A Warning—To Those In Rome (Rom. 16:1-20)" in *The Book of Romans: The Eighth Annual Spiritual Lectureship* (Ark: National Christian Press, 1983), 244.

[4] Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5.

[5] See Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 18.

[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Alexander Campbell, "Millennium. No. II," *The Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

[13] Leroy Garrett, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 1 (February 1975): 25.

[14] Ibid., 24.

[15] For earlier views and reactions toward the dissent, see John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1980). Formerly this book was entitled *The Acts and Monuments,* first published on March 20, 1563. In his day executions occurred on a regular basis for holding different opinions from the established church. In the "Biographical Sketch," one senses the concern of Foxe for the intolerable condition in his day, page xii:

> In 1575 Foxe energetically sought to obtain the remission of the capital sentence in the case of two Dutch Anabaptists condemned to the stake for their opinions. He wrote to the Queen, Lord Burghley, and Lord Chief Justice Manson, pointing out the disproportion between the offence and the punishment, and deprecating the penalty of death in cases of heresy. A respite of a month was allowed, but both the Anabaptists perished.

See also Jock Purvis, *Fair Sunshine: Character Studies of the Scottish Covenanters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982). This book is an outline on Scottish Covenant History in the 17th century. The atrocities committed against believers because they refused to conform to the established church are appalling. One citation from this book is sufficient to set the tone for the horrors perpetrated against other believers is mind-boggling, where it is written, page 69:

> The year 1685 was a terrible year in a terrible era. The Killing Time reeked reddest then, The author of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe, one of the most painstaking and sympathetic writers on the Covenanter, 'fixes on the barbarities of this year to support his opinion that the Scottish persecution was worse than that of the Roman Emperors and Popish Inquisitors.'

[16] Alexander Campbell, "Mark Them Who Cause Division," *Millennial Harbinger* 3 (5 November 1832"): 604.

[17] Leroy Garrett, "Forbearance and Unity," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 13, 14.

[18] Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.

[19] Ibid., 124, 125.

[20] John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1970), 44.

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[24] See Thomas Campbell and Barton W. Stone, *Declaration and Address [1809] and the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery [1804]* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1955, reprint), 17.

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[28] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). 60.

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[30] Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

[31] I am deeply indebted to Justo and Catherine Gonzalez for much insight concerning the effect of tradition upon one's handling of Holy Scripture. See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

What the Bible Says About Saving Faith

Thrust Statement: **Faith in Jesus is the very fabric of life.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 10:1-21**[1]

Faith is fundamental in the Christian community. Everyone lives by faith. Faith is the very fabric of life in any field of endeavor. One exercises faith in one's personal, social, commercial, national, international life, and so on. This is especially true in one's walk with the Lord. The Hebrew writer expresses it this way: "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (**Hebrews 11:6**). Again, this writer calls attention to the universe and faith: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (**11:3**).

In this same vein, the writer gives some insight concerning Noah and faith: "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (**11:7**). Another classic example of faith in Hebrews is about the faith of Moses:

> By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (**11:24-26**).

If you would like to understand more about faith, read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Faith is also spoken of as the foundation of making one's calling and election sure. Peter encourages those "who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours" (**2 Peter 1:1**). To this faith, Peter admonishes the believers to supply abundantly the following: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (**1:5-7**). There must be appropriation of the things we know concerning Christ and His work. In other words, one may know Christ as divine, and yet reject Him as savior. Biblical faith is not just simply an assent of the mind, but also, it is a surrender of the heart and affections to Jesus as Lord.

Matthew also reveals a number of references within which he mentions faith in conjunction with various individuals' encounters with Jesus. For example, after Jesus healed two demon-possessed men, he went to Capernaum and healed a paralytic (**Matthew 9:1-8**). Matthew reports: "Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven'" (**9:1-2**). On the other hand, one reads where Jesus chided His disciples for their lack of faith during a storm: "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" (**8:26**).

Christians are told to put their faith in the Son of God. The Christian life begins with faith and ends with faith. Faith is the channel or instrument through which the righteousness of God comes to man. Paul expresses it this way: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' (**Romans 1:17**). Paul writes that God's saving gospel of righteousness is "out of faith" (ejk pivstew"). "Out of faith" is at the same time "unto faith" or "to faith" (eij" pivstin). In other words, the righteousness of God imputed to man begins with faith and ends with faith.

THE ADVENT OF SAVING FAITH

How does faith come? Is it a miraculous operation in which God gives faith to some but withholds faith from others? Or is faith something that comes to man through the proclamation of the word about Christ? Listen to Paul as he explains the way an individual receives faith: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**). Faith is not the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, but rather, faith comes through the announcement of the good news about Jesus.

Faith comes about as a result of the heralding of the message, but salvation comes about through one's belief in the message about Christ. Paul writes, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (**1 Corinthians 1:21**). The KJV reads—"foolishness of preaching"—as if it is the preaching that is foolish rather than the message itself.[2] For Paul, the emphasis is not on the act of proclamation, but rather upon the contents of what is proclaimed. The divine proclamation (κήρυγμα) and faith (πιστός) are correlatives. The proclamation calls for faith and is received only by faith. The NKJV corrects the earlier translation by translating: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not

know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."[3]

The preaching of the gospel is a necessity. Every person hears and believes through the act of proclamation. God not only chose His apostles for the purpose of telling the good news, but He has also called all the reconciled into this ministry. Paul declares this concept in his second letter to the Corinthians:

> Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God (**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**).

MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION

God has committed to us this word of reconciliation. Paul also speaks of this word of reconciliation as the "message of salvation" (**Acts 13:25**), the "message of the cross" (**1 Corinthians 1:18**), and the "word of life" (**Philippians 2:16**). Our task as ministers is to bring to the world this objective reconciliation for subjective appropriation by faith. How does faith come? Once more, listen to the words of Paul: "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**). The gospel must not only be heralded, but it must be heard. As the gospel is proclaimed, every hearer needs to be reminded of the words of Jesus: "He who has ears, let him hear" (**Matthew 11:15**). This point must be emphasized. Today, there is much listening without true hearing.

OBEYING THE GOSPEL

Is your heart open to the message of God? Do you have the kind of heart that Lydia possessed when she heard the message of salvation from Paul? Luke records that " One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (**Acts 16:14**). Paul bemoans the fact that even after the preaching of the good news, nevertheless, there are still those who do not believe the message (**Romans 10:15-16**). The more familiar reading—"obeyed the gospel"—is found in the KJV as well as the Greek text. The KJV reads: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel (ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ). For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (**10:16**).

To "obey the gospel" is to believe the message. When one believes the message of the gospel, one must also respond to baptism as commanded by the Lord (**Matthew 28:18-20**). In the Gospel of Mark, both belief and baptism are jointed together: Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:16**). Luke informs his readers that following Lydia's belief: "When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my

house.' And she persuaded us" (**Acts 16:15**). Saving faith requires response to the message of God's way of salvation, namely, Jesus. Paul, in his second letter to Thessalonica, writes: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel (μή ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ) of our Lord Jesus" (**2 Thessalonians 1:8**). Again, to "obey the gospel" is to submit to Jesus as Lord in your life.

ACTIVITY OF SAVING FAITH

Saving faith levels everyone. In other words, the advantages of intellect, opportunity, and substance do not operate in the sphere of faith. Paul declares, "As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts (πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων) in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all (πάντας) who call on him, for, 'Everyone who (πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἄν) calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (**Romans 10:11-13**). Faith places everyone in the same position as regards the grace of God. Faith minimizes man's merits while it magnifies God's mercy. Salvation is not based on race; salvation is not based on riches; salvation is not based on rank; salvation is not based on education; salvation is not based upon absolute perfection in knowledge. No! No! None of these things count. God sweeps all of those things aside and levels every man at the foot of the cross.

Did you really grasp **Romans 10:13**? Listen once more: "for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" This is exactly the same thing that our Lord said to Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

One cannot read the Scriptures or hear the message of the gospel without being led to the fact that Jesus is God's plan of salvation. He and He alone is the Savior of the world. No wonder Peter told the members of the Sanhedrin: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**).

AFFIRMATION OF SAVING FAITH

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**). Prior to this statement about how faith comes, Paul stresses that saving faith is confessing Christ as Lord: "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart (ἐν τῇ καρδία σου) that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (**10:9**). Confession and belief go hand in hand. In order for one to have eternal life, he/she must confess and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Paul further says, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (**10:10**). Saving faith leads men and women to Jesus.

In Jesus one escapes the wrath of God (**Romans 5**), in Jesus one escapes the dominion of sin (**Romans 6**), in Jesus one escapes the curse of the Law (**Romans 7**), and in Jesus one escapes condemnation (**Romans 8**). The salvation that God offers to man through faith involves the death of Christ on the cross. It is in this vein that Paul writes:

> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (**Philippians 4:8-11**).

CONCLUSION

Will you make this declaration of faith by confessing Jesus as your Savior and Lord? The appearance of saving faith comes through the proclamation and hearing of the gospel. The action of faith levels all people to the condition of the cross and leads them to the Christ of the gospel. This affirmation of faith confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord. Have you ever exercised such faith in Christ? If you wish to be one of God's elect, you must confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. Are you one of the elect? If not, will you not accept Jesus now and become a part of that body that God foreordained before the foundation of the world to redeem? This predestination pertains to those in Christ (ἐν Χροστῳ). The chosen of God are those that are in Him (**Ephesians 1:3-22**). Why not respond with these words:

> My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine! Now hear me while I pray, Take all my guilt away, O let me from this day Be wholly Thine!

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise

[2] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[3] *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

Your Spiritual Act of Worship

Thrust Statement: **God wants unity between the Sunday gatherings and the weekday routines.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 12:1-2**

In **Romans 12:1-2**, Paul calls attention to the kind of behavior that Christians should exhibit in their day-to-day walk with God. As you read and reread these two verses, one cannot help but wonder what kind of impact these words have in remolding your way of life. Paul, in verse one, speaks of "Your spiritual act of worship" (NIV), which is also rendered in the KJV as "Your reasonable service." This phrase should cause each one to stop and reflect upon the import of this unique expression. As one seeks to grapple with the intent of this call to worship, one must ask himself or herself, how can I present my body a living sacrifice to God? This verse is not speaking of the so-called worship service that Christians celebrate each Lord's Day.

Christians celebrate each Lord's Day because they are worshipers of the One true God. How does one present his or her body a living sacrifice? What is worship? Do you consider your life a life of worship? How do you treat your wife or husband? Do you use disrespectful language? How do you talk to your wife or husband? How do you speak to your children? How do you have a discussion with those outside and those within the body of Christ? Do you use verbal communication that is seasoned with salt to bring honor and glory to God? Can you say that your life is a life of sacrifice to God? Can you describe your life as a life that is in harmony with the admonition of the author of Hebrews in his closing remarks about a life of sacrifice? Listen to the author as he draws attention to a life that pleases God:

> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. [16] And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (**Hebrews 13:15-16**).[1]

One can hardly read this passage without a recollection of the Roman passage. Do you offer to God a sacrifice of praise through your lips? Do you do good? Do you share with others? Has **Romans 12:1-2** made a difference in your lifestyle? Do you disconnect what you do on Sunday from what you do during the week? Is there a dichotomy between worship and work in your thinking? Is your concept of worship limited to one hour a week? What does this section of Scripture mean to you?

Presenting one's body as a living sacrifice involves one's meeting with the saints. Does Paul suggest in **Romans 12:1-2** that the gatherings on Sunday are not true service to God? The answer is no! How does one harmonize what one does on Sunday with what one does during the week—twenty-fours a day? Both are related to one another. When one presents his or her body to God as a living sacrifice, this activity also entails the local gatherings that occur during the week, which includes the Sunday gatherings. These local gatherings, especially on Sundays, help to prepare God's people for the kind of service that God expects from one twenty-four hours a day. When Christians meet together to hear the Word of God and to respond to that Word with prayers and hymns and spiritual songs of praise, this kind of worship, or devotion, is the background for other kinds of service exhibited in the life of every believer.

Many Christians—both men and women who profess faith in Christ—have no understanding of the importance of this gathering for public worship. The Church ought to be a place where support for forgiveness and love and encouragement are extended to the down-and-out. Even though this essay speaks of the "public worship" of the congregation, this is not to say that God has ordained a "public worship" with certain rituals to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed way—commonly known as five-acts of worship. There is nothing in the New Testament about a worship service. Christians come together because they are worshippers of God. One may describe the activities that one engages in as acts of worship, just as he or she may describe other activities done in the name of Jesus during the week as worship. Whether one is assembled with the saints or not, one never ceases to worship the One who created the heavens and the earth. It is because one is a worshiper of God that he or she assembles with the saints on Sunday.

Christians should not abandon the assembling of themselves together (**Hebrews 10:25**). It is through the Church that believers are reminded that they are not their own. Even in the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper), Christians are reminded of the unfailing witness to the reality of redemption in and through Jesus Christ. As God's people listen to the Word preached, one's mind and heart is open to the message of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The Church has been chosen by God as the vehicle of His special revelation, namely, the proclamation of Jesus as the savior of fallen humanity. Christians come together to encourage and strengthen one another only to go back into the world to share God's Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

One might also say that the Christian community is the one place where the self-governing individual is reminded that with all his or her proud self-sufficiency, he or she is not his or her own, but stands in the presence of God with whom he or she has come to terms of forgiveness and fellowship with God the Father in and through Jesus, God's Messiah. J. H. Oldham strips away the husk and goes right to the kernel of the purpose of assembling:

> We misunderstand the significance of Christian worship if we think primarily of its subjective aspects. The central thing is not the elevation of the soul to God in pious thoughts, but the new orientation of life which follows from the acknowledgment of the reality of God, and from the deliverance through His redeeming grace from self-centeredness, which is the essential, fundamental sin and evil and the corruption of all morality.[2]

The Christian assembly has been turned into a new legal code of rules and regulations concerning how to observe certain prescribed rituals. The Sunday gatherings with its emphasis upon five acts of worship has been set forth as a new law with little interest for the proclamation of the redeeming facts of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus as the atonement for the sins of the world. Many Christians have turned the Gospel into a new legal code. Christians must ever be on guard to protect the Gospel of God from this kind of corruption. Once again, Oldham writes:

> Religion has come to be thought of as one department among others instead of something that is concerned with the whole of life. To the man in the street religion is one of the many special pursuits followed by people who have a bent in that direction. A false dichotomy dominates the whole of our present thinking and colours our ordinary speech. We refer, for example, to prayer and worship as entering into the presence of God—as though God were not present in every moment of our lives and in every action we perform. "To go into the Church" is a phrase that is often used to describe a vocation to the Christian ministry. When we speak of the Church fulfilling this or that function in the social sphere we tend instinctively to think of the clergy doing something about it or of assemblies, in which the clergy predominate or take the leading part, taking some action. To a far greater extent than we ordinarily realize our whole thought about the Church has become clericalized. If the Church is to be an effective force in the social and political sphere our first task is to laicize our thought about it. We stand before a great historic task—the task of restoring the lost unity between worship and work.[3]

One should never discount the Church, which owes its existence to an act of God (**Acts 20:28**). The Church is not merely a human organization, but rather a community of which Jesus is the Living Lord. God, in His wisdom, designed the body of Christ—the Christian *ekklesia*—as the vehicle of spreading the Gospel of God. In other words, the Church is the witness and the continuing embodiment of the historical fact that God sent His Son so that both men and women might become heirs of eternal life through adoption into God's family (**Galatians 4:1-7**). When one becomes a Christian, he or she becomes a part of the community of believers who are knit together in one indivisible whole. God's people come together in order that each person may have fellowship with others, may praise God together, and share together in God's Holy Word. These activities help God's people to have a communion that is centered in Jesus Christ. This gathering does not exist merely for the individual, but rather to unite God's people into consciousness that they all belong together.

God never meant for His people to live in solitary confinement. In Christ, one discovers that Christ has put an end to atomization. Christians are not alone, but belong

to the inner life of the people of God. We are one bread and one body (**1 Corinthians 10:17**). One means whereby we offer our bodies as living sacrifices is through the Christian community. As Christians, individuals do not belong to themselves, they do not live unto themselves; they belong to God (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Members of the Church belong for each other and with each other (**Hebrews 3:12-14**). In the Church, Christians are called to a life of service (**Romans 12:1-2**).

One's whole life is to become one of service. Is your life a life of service? Have you presented your body to God as a living sacrifice? Is God first in your life? Is money first in your life? Is pleasure first in your life? Is the world first in your life? Is God number one in your life? Is your life divided? Do you remember the following words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount—"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (**Matthew 6:24-25**)? What is this statement of Jesus saying to you? Do you think you can serve both God and money? Do you think you can serve both God and Satan at the same time?

Why do so many refuse to hear the message of the Gospel? They do not wish to serve. Loyalty to Christ implies membership in His society. Is there commitment to the cause of Christ in your life? This membership involves allegiance. If one withholds his or her duty, one weakens his or her influence in the community of the redeemed. When God calls men and women to partnership with Him, He desires their cooperation in the whole range of commitment to His cause—redemption for humanity. This membership demands sacrifice—sacrifice of self to God. Christians are to emulate Christ's ministry in their own lives: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:28**). This saying of Jesus expresses the whole of His life. God wants the whole of one's life in His service. Jesus, in response to the greatest commandment in the Law, says:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (**22:37-40**).

When one becomes a Christian, this rebirth calls for renewal and commitment. Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the life of service:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

In Christ, no one lives unto himself or herself. One's whole life is a life of service. When one is in Christ, he or she cannot be free except as servants of God. In the words of Paul: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). One's life should be a dedication to the kingdom of God and His righteousness. One should look for things that will give pleasure to

God in his or her everyday actions. Once more listen to Paul as he calls for holiness in the life of those who were raised with Christ in baptism:

> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. [18] You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. [19] I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. [20] When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. [21] What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! [22] But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in[a] Christ Jesus our Lord (**6:17-23**).

Everyone is to refashion his or her heart so that he or she no longer points to himself or herself, but to God. If one will look at God's mercy, one's own heart will be melted and remolded and reoriented from a self-centered life to a life that is God-centered. Is your concept of the Sunday assembly God-centered or self-centered? What is your custom regarding the assembly? Is it important in your life? Or are other things of greater significance than meeting with the people of God. Is Sunday just a day for visiting relatives, a day for going to the lake for recreation, a day for fishing, a day for working in order to lay up more financial treasures on earth, and so on? Is Christ really and truly Lord of your life? When you call Jesus Lord, is this just simply pious platitudes, something that just sounds good? Prior to Paul calling forth for total devotion, he set forth the mystery of God as it was unfolded in Christ. When one looks at the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, this objective transaction calls for total commitment from every believer. Just as the religions of the world call for sacrifice, the religion of Christ (if one may call it a religion) implies sacrifice. God wants only one sacrifice following the sacrifice of Christ—the sacrifice of one's body to Him. Christianity is concerned with sacrifice. Is your body presented as a sacrifice to God as your spiritual act of worship?

God has set your feet on a new path in Jesus Christ. With this transformation of one's life, one comes to walk in a path that is opposed to the ways of the world. Since you are in Christ, you must strive to advance this new direction. Paul calls attention to this new life in Romans:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [2] By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? [3] Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (**Romans 6:1-4**).

CONCLUSION

Christians are no longer servants of sin, but are now the servants of righteousness. In Christianity, one reverses his or her former way of life. You have reversed your directions, directions that formerly led to destruction but that now leads to life. This new path in Christ Jesus is directed away from one's self-centeredness to God-centeredness. One is sidetracked from one's own inbred aims to devotion to Christ. One now seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**). The Sunday gatherings help Christians to focus their attention on God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This particular gathering helps each one to be more God-centered, not self-centered. You should allow yourself to be changed from self-seeking to God-seeking. Every day should be as sacred as the so-called Divine service on Sundays. What is the motivating factor for this change in ethical behavior? The message of the Cross is the rousing reason for change.

Is there a unity between your Sunday worship and your weekday routine? Does the hearing of God's Word on Sundays make you radioactive during the week? True worship is the presenting of your body as a living sacrifice to God. Christians must ever remember the mercy of God exhibited in Jesus, which concept will redirect one's selfish motives to the ways of God. It is God's love that leads to the Cross of Jesus. When one comes to this realization of God's love, there will be unity between one's Sunday worship and one's daily practice. Christians should not neglect the service on Sundays in order that they may through communication with other Christians be made, as it were, radioactive in the lives of others.

In the assembly, Christians become conscious that they are the people of God. As you begin your day-to-day activities, you should ever be conscious that you should begin each morning with a link to God and to others. Every child of God is a member of the world-wide-Church of God. Remember that the Church is not an institution, but rather it is the fellowship of persons and nothing else. In Christ, new life broke into the world. Where does the renewal of the Church take place? It is with you in the market place. The Church is important in the lives of God's people. Loyalty to Christ implies membership (association) in the society of redeemed ones, which He founded. If one withholds his or her allegiance to the body of Christ, he or she weakens the influence of the community of the redeemed. Christians are called out of the world only to be sent back into the world to bring about transformation of the world. When God calls men and women into partnership, He desires their cooperation in the whole range of their activities—twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday meetings. Are you lacking in zeal for the things of God? Is your spiritual fervor burning for the Lord? Are you serving the Lord with a flicker of fire or with a burning hot flame? In your conversion to Christ, have you actually renewed your mind—a mind that concentrates upon spiritual things? Once more, one needs to ask himself or herself the following question: What does Paul's words to the Romans really mean to me?

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship. [2] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and

approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Have you offered your body to the Lord? Is your focus in life more on the material or more on the spiritual? Have you been untouched by the spiritual since your conversion? Are you still conformed to the thinking of the world? To the world, Sunday is just another day? Is Sunday just another day of the week to you? Is there any special significance associated in your mind to this event of God's society of redeemed ones coming together to encourage and strengthen one another in the faith? How can you fulfill this admonition by Paul in your own life? What does he mean by presenting your body as a living sacrifice, which he describes as "your spiritual act of worship"?

> 9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.[a] Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"[b] says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."[c] 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (**12:9-21**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the New International Version, unless stated otherwise. Also, any footnote with letters of the alphabet belong to the verse or verses immediately cited above.

[2] Dr. W. A. Visser't Hoof & Dr. J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its Function in Society* (London: George Allen& Unwin, 1937, 1938), 155.

[3] Ibid., 118.

a Deut. 6:5

b Lev. 19:18

a Or *reasonable*

a Or *through*

a Or *reasonable*

a Or *willing to do menial work*

b Deut. 32:35

c Prov. 25:21,22

A New Creation In Christ

Thrust Statement: **In Christ one becomes a new creation.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Corinthians 5:9-21**

On October 3, 1999, this congregation (Oakwood Hills Church) witnessed three souls who became a "new creation" in Christ Jesus.[1] What does it mean to be a "new creation" in Christ? Does this necessitate a change in one's thinking? Does this "new creation" demand a change in one's way of living? Does this "new creation" call for a change in one's conversations about God's way of redemption? Paul says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).[2]

BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR GO HAND IN HAND

What Christians believe and how they behave go hand in hand; one cannot separate conviction and performance. For Paul obligation and belief go together. It is in this vein that Paul admonishes the Corinthians to remember: "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (**5:9**). What is your purpose? Is your ambition to please God? When one is born for a second time, one's target should always be to satisfy God. For one to give pleasure to God, there must be transformation in one's conduct and thoughts. To the Christians at Colossae, Paul calls attention to the necessity of a change in behavior and thinking. He wants them to reflect upon the implications of their resurrection with Him:

> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (**Colossians 3:1-4**).

For Paul, the new birth places emphasis on a change in one's affection and a renovation in one's thinking. The Christian not only sets his heart upon things above, but he also thinks heaven. Every believer now is a minister of the reconciliation. It is the duty of Chris, Kelly, Timothy ("T. J"), Donna, and Patrick to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God. Paul writes: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Every believer should seek to tell the story of the cross, even in the face of opposition. Paul reminds the saints at Thessalonica:

> You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you (**1 Thessalonians 2:1-3**).

MOTIVATION FOR MINISTRY: THE FEAR OF THE LORD

As Paul contemplates this ministry of reconciliation, he says," Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men" (**2 Corinthians 5:11**). *The New Jerusalem Bible* translates this verse: "And so it is with the fear of the Lord always in mind that we try to win people over."[3] Do you fear the Lord? But what does it mean to fear the Lord? This is not the kind of fear that a child awaits from his/her parents for disobedience. This fear is the fear that prevents one from desecrating a holy place. It is not so much terror as it is awe and reverence as you serve God. Moses asked the children of God: "And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (**Deuteronomy 10:12**).

Solomon says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (**Proverbs 1:7**). Again, the Holy Spirit says, "Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil" (**16:6**). Without this cleansing fear, one cannot serve God acceptably. The psalmist says, "The fear of the LORD is pure" (**Psalms 19:9**). Paul, in this second letter to Corinth, is trying to persuade the Corinthians of his own "fear of the Lord," that is his to say, his sincerity of admiration and veneration. He wants them to understand his motives. He says in his defense:

> Since we know what it means to fear the Lord, we try to help people accept the truth about us. God knows what we really are, and I hope that in your hearts you know, too. We are not trying to prove ourselves to you again, but we are telling you about ourselves so you will be proud of us (**2 Corinthians 5:11-12**).[4]

Paul reacts over the feedback of others about his actions. He does not want his message injured. He is conscious that any communication is judged in the context of one's character. Paul desires to avoid even the appearance of evil lest his message be rejected. Thus, he lets the Corinthians know:

> If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (**5:13-15**).

Paul insists that there has been only one motivating factor in his service—to serve God and to assist the Corinthians in their relationship with God. Paul lived for the One who died and was raised again. Do you live for the One who died and was raised again? What is your motivating factor in your service? Is it to serve God and the saints in Christ Jesus?

A NEW CREATION

Paul goes right to the heart of the moving motivation of it all—"he died for all." To Paul the Christian is "in Christ" (**5:17**). Every believer died with Christ and arose a new person. The hands of God freshly created him/her in this rebirth. In this newness of life, each person has a set of new standards—the Word of God. God wants His children to separate themselves from the world around them. Christians are not to walk in darkness. It is in this regard that Paul admonishes the Ephesians: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (**Ephesians 5:8-11**).

When one is a new creation in Christ Jesus, then there is a new set of priorities. One is careful about his/her activities in the Lord. Again, Paul cautions the Christians at Ephesus:

> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (**5:15-21**).

Every saint is to allow Jesus Christ to work out His will in his or her life. The author of Hebrews expresses it this way:

> May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (**Hebrews 13:20-21**).

Jesus died that individuals might live *for* Him. Paul captures this concept in his second letter to Corinth, when he writes: "he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (**2**

Corinthians 5:15). This truth is also explained in his letter to Rome. In this epistle, Paul lets the Romans know that when Christ died, they, too, died in Him and with Him. He wanted them to understand that in their baptism, they identified themselves with Christ. He says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (**Romans 6:4**). Again, he records:

> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness (**6:10-13**).

When Chris, "T. J.," Donna, Patrick, Casey, David, Mike, and Jeremy were baptized, they died in order that they might live *for* God. This is the positive aspect of their identification with Christ. They not only died with Him, but they were raised with Him in order that they might "live a new life" (**6:4**). They, as well as all Christians, are to bear fruit for God's glory: "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God" (**7:4**). Jesus died that we might live through Him. Jesus was raised from the dead in order that the "set apart" ones might bear fruit to God. John jots down: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (**1 John 4:9**).

Every Christian should remember the words of Paul, "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (**1 Corinthians 5:15**). If one has been to the cross and has been saved, how can one spend the rest of his or her life in selfishness? In 1858 Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879), while visiting Germany, saw a painting of the crucifixion with the words underneath: "I did this for thee, What hast thou done for Me?" Following this moving moment, she wrote a poem based on that motto. Shortly thereafter she threw the poem into the fire, but the paper came out unharmed. Her father encouraged her to polish the poem, and it was later published. Christians today still sing this poem set to music. Listen to the words:

> I gave My life for thee,
> My precious blood I shed,
> That thou might'st ransomed be,
> And quickened from the dead.
> I gave, I gave, My life for thee,
> What hast thou given for Me?

CONCLUSION

Christ died that we might live *through* Him and *for* Him and *with* Him. Paul tells the Christians at Thessalonica: "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (**1 Thessalonians 5:10**). What does it mean to you to say that you are a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. Are you conscious of the fact

that you are reconciled to God through Jesus? Are you aware of the actuality that you are an ambassador of God? Are you cognizant of the truth of God's righteousness that is imputed to you through Jesus Christ? Listen again as Paul caps off what he says about a new creation:

> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:18-21**).

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[1] The following were baptized into Christ: (1) Christopher L. Miller, (2) Timothy Jason Hughes, and (3) Donna Marie Hughes. Just prior to the above date, Patrick Warnick was baptized on August 29, 1999

[2] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless otherwise stated.

[3] *The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

[4] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

All Christians:

Ministers of Reconciliation

Thrust Statement: **Every Christian is a minister of reconciliation.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1**[1]

Are you a minister of God? How do you answer this question? Is the minister simply someone who stands in the pulpit on a weekly basis to expound the Word of God? Are Christians in general ministers of God? Do you view yourself as a minister of God? Is the preaching of the Gospel something that is only done by a professional class of so-called clergymen? Are you a servant or minister of God? Are you concerned about others ministering or serving the cause of Christ? Do you pray that God will send forth laborers into His Harvest? Are you one of the laborers? Do you expect God to send someone else to minister to others? Do you feel a responsibility of making known the Gospel of Christ and winning others to Him? Just how do you respond to these questions? The words of Paul to the Corinthians should ring loud and clear in the hearts of everyone born from above. Listen to Paul as he captures the essence of ministry among God's people:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the

> righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:2**)

God has reconciled every believer to Himself through Christ. As a result of this reconciliation, God desires that every believer exercise his or her responsibilities in this "ministry of reconciliation." Even though Paul speaks of this "ministry of reconciliation" as something God gave to him and to his fellowworkers, nevertheless, one can hardly fathom the words of the Holy Spirit without a consciousness that this "ministry of reconciliation" is not reserved for just a select few. Every child of God is to be a "fellow worker."

EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH

Silent Christians

It is my desire to present a healthy challenge to you to reclaim the evangelistic vision of the early church and embark afresh on winning others to Him. To do this, one must recapture the urgency of proclamation, that is to say, the sharing of God's way of salvation in Jesus, the savior of the world. Are you a silent Christian? Is there shyness on your part about speaking to others about the love of God? If the Gospel is the good news of God, do we incur guilt if we do not pass it on? Are you a silent saint? Is this a silent church? Is this silence guilty silence? How can people believe in Jesus if they do not hear about Him? It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Christians in Rome.

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (**Romans 10:8-15**).

In this context, Paul poses the question, how can one believe in Him if he or she has not heard about Him? This faith in Jesus comes through the proclamation of the Good News about God's method of justification for sinful man. Are you talkative about salvation? Some people seldom stop talking. One wonders why it is that when salvation is the subject that many dry up in their conversation. Does our silence betray our lack of Christian assurance and excitement? Have we forgotten Paul's words to the Corinthians about the ministry of reconciliation? It is well to listen once more to the words of Paul.

> If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

Vocal Christians

What is it that causes a Christian to be active in evangelistic witness? One such cause is undoubtedly related to obedience to God. Every Christian is to glorify God in his or her body. It is in this train of thought that Paul writes: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Every child of God is a priest, not just a select few. The apostle Peter calls attention to the role of ministry of every individual:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

This Epistle teaches the priesthood of all believers, not just so-called male clergy. Even though Jesus broke down the barriers that separated the priest from the laity, nevertheless, leaders within the Christian community sought to reestablish that which Jesus sought to change. Aida Besancon Spencer makes the following succinct observation about the change:

> The very barriers Jesus had dismantled were later to be rebuilt: barriers between priest and layperson, man and woman, Jew and Gentile. The dead animal skin that was the tent has become living human flesh. The movable tent has become alive. The body of Christ, God's sanctuary, is God's people. However, after the third century AD, Christians began constructing buildings in imitation of that old marble temple. The sanctuary or "holy of holies" became the pulpit set on a porch above the people. No longer were women or lay people allowed to enter that "holy of holies" and there hear and speak God's message. The raised place became reserved again for certain purified males. The priesthood of all believers became the priesthood of males again. The good news for all became the good news for the powerful and the rich. The good news for the women became the good news for the men. Today some seminaries maintain the old style of encouraging men first, women second, or women not at all to learn and teach. The antipathy between Jew and Gentile is often still with us. However, no matter how extensively people try to pour cement into that former foundation, the living temple will grow up and crack the imitation![2]

Each person in God's kingdom should participate in sharing the message of salvation. One can share Christ in his or her daily walk with God. Peter's words, as cited above, are to the point in reminding Christians of their true status. If Christians wish to be successful priests, they must live good lives. Listen once more to Peter as he seeks to emphasize purity of life as a means of winning souls to Christ:

> Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. [12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (**1 Peter 2:11-12**).

In seeking to do the will of Christ, we are not at liberty to pick and choose His commandments. Christians are to exhibit dedication in their walk with God. Again, Paul says, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain**" (1 Corinthians 15:58**). Thus, we are not to overlook the last words of our Lord in His instructions to make disciples of all nations:

> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:19-20**).

It was the vocation of Christ to bear witness to the truth; it is our vocation to bear witness to Him. The first incentive for evangelism is a loving obedience to God and His Christ, and the second incentive for evangelism is a loving concern for men. Are we sharing with our neighbors the "bread from heaven" (**John 6:32**)? In this same speech—Jesus, Bread of Life—our Lord declares: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (**John 6:35**). Do we believe this? Have we forgotten the words of Jesus: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (**John 3:36**).

Are you ashamed of the Gospel? Have you reached the stage in which you are embarrassed when talking about Him? Paul could write to Rome and say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (**Romans 1:16**). Why was Paul not ashamed? Listen once more to his penetrating words: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last (εχκ πιψστεώ ειϊς πιψστιν, ek pistews eis pistin), just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**1:17**). Again, pay attention to Paul as he takes wings to the heights of heaven as he describes the Gospel in a nutshell:

> But now (ΝυνιΨ δεΨ, Nuni de) a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

MINISTERS OF RECONCILIATION

Evangelism is never to be thought of as the task of a select few. Every Christian should practice what Andrew did when he found out about the Messiah. John writes, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (**John 1:40-42**). John also records another incident of someone sharing Jesus; this one was Philip. Jesus found him and said follow me. And, as a result of this call, he, in like manner, "found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'" (**John 1:45**). One cannot help but recall the words of Michael the archangel to Daniel:

> There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (**Daniel 12:1-3**).

The Work of Sunday School Teachers

Do not ever forget that you are the channel of imparting a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Bring your classes together and pray for conversions. Don't ever say that that boy or girl is too small or too insignificant. If you bring that boy or that girl to Christ, what a reformation we could have. There may be a Martin Luther, a John Wesley, a Paul Bunyan, a Billy Sunday, a Billy Graham, or an Alexander Campbell. Today, I want to share with you a number of conversions mentioned by Dwight L. Moody in his sermon "The Reward of the Faithful."[3] I share these stories in order to help you see the importance of your own personal ministry in leading souls to Christ.

Little Girl's Testimony

First, Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) related the story of a teacher in southern Illinois, who taught her little girl to love the Savior. The teacher asked the young girl to get her father to come to Sunday school. This father was a swearing and drinking man; the love of God was not in his heart. But through the teacher's insistence, the little girl told her father about Jesus' love for him. This man came and accepted Christ. Before long, he had been instrumental in founding over seven hundred and eight Sunday schools in southern Illinois.[4]

The Work of a Young Man

Second, Moody relates another story about a man whom he met in New York. At the time of this meeting, the man was a very diligent worker for the cause of Christ. Moody asked him to tell him about his experience. This man told Moody that he had been a drunkard for over twenty years. His parents had forsaken him; his wife

divorced him and married someone else. One day he went into an attorney's office, stoned out of his mind. He told the attorney what a sinner he was. He said, "I must be pretty low when my father and mother, my wife and kindred, cast me off, and there is no hope for me here or hereafter."[5] But the attorney proved a true Samaritan—he told him about Jesus and about salvation. He guided his face toward Zion, the city of God. This man became a leader of a young men's meeting in New York.

Young Man's Testimony

Again, Moody told another incident that occurred during one of his revival meetings. A young man in New York got up and told his experience. He said, "Nine months ago a Christian came to my house and told me that he wanted me to become a Christian. He pointed out the error of my ways, for I had been a hard drinker. I became converted and have not touched a drop of liquor since. If any one had asked who the most hopeless man in New York was, they would have pointed to me." Moody says that at the time this man gave his testimony, he was the superintendent of a Sunday school.[6]

Lady in London

Finally, he tells about a mother in London who had traveled from Dundee to London, five hundred miles, just to ask Moody to pray for her boys. Later in London, she attended a meeting conducted by Moody. She was accompanied by only one of her boys—the other had died. This woman was a woman of wealth. She gave up her beautiful home and resided near the Agricultural Hall in order to be available to counsel those seeking the Lord. Toward the close of the meeting, she sent a letter to Moody. The letter, in part, reads:

> My husband and I have sought as our greatest privilege to take unconverted friends one by one to the Agricultural Hall, and I thank God that, with a single exception, those brought under the preaching from your lips have accepted Christ as their Savior, and are rejoicing in His love.[7]

Moody says that when he left London, she had the names of 150 who had accepted Christ from her. Moody went on to say, "If we had a thousand such mothers in Chicago we would lift it.

CONCLUSION

Today, I encourage you to take ten minutes to talk with someone about Jesus. Ten minutes for Christ every day will bring forth laborers into the harvest. Why not be like Andrew and bring your relatives or friends or strangers to Christ. Why not be like Philip and find a Nathanael and tell him about the Messiah. Remember that we are all ambassadors for God's kingdom. Remember that Jesus "has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (**2 Corinthians 5:19-21**).

God gives the increase, but God expects His disciples to share the Good News about His Way of salvation to a lost and dying world (**John 14:6**). God expects His people to pray to Him to increase the laborers in His vineyard (**Luke 10:1-3**). If one prays, one will labor. One will not pray without a consciousness of his or her own responsibilities in leading others to Christ. One cannot look at the growth in this congregation without a consciousness of an outreach from various individuals. If those who are associated with this congregation—New Covenant Fellowship—are reaching out to others, this fellowship of believers will experience tremendous growth.

What are you doing to reach out to others? Are you making that extra visit or that extra telephone call? Remember, every child of God is a minister of this reconciliation. The growth of this congregation depends upon your sharing with others the Good News about God's Way of salvation, which is Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world. No one is exempt from sharing Jesus. What are you doing to win souls for Christ? Remember once more the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 5:17—6:2**)

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[2] Ada Besancon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1985), 62-63.

[3] Dwight L. Moody, "The Reward of the Faithful," in ***A Heritage of Great Evangelical Teaching*** (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1996), 946-952.

[4] Ibid., 948.

[5] Ibid., 949.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 951.

Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9:

subjective or Objective Genitive?

> Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (**2 John 9**).[1]

Thrust statement: **The one who denies that Jesus has not come in the flesh is not of God.**

Scripture readings: 2 John 9; 1 John 2:22-23; 1 John 4:1-3

What did John mean by the "teaching of Christ" in this short letter "to the chosen lady and her children" (**2 John 1**)? Does the "teaching of Christ" in **2 John 9** condemn instrumental music in the so-called corporate worship service? Does this verse denounce the use of a plurality of cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the observance of the Lord's supper? Does one break the rules found in **2 John 9** for participation in teaching children on Sunday in a Sunday school classroom? Does one transgress **2 John 9** if one uses wine instead of grape juice in the communion? Does one overstep **2 John 9** if one "breaks" the bread instead of "pinching" the bread? If one practices "hand clapping" in the assembly, does one violate the "teaching of Christ" in **2 John 9**? Can one sing a "solo" in the congregation and not disobey the "teaching of Christ" in **2 John 9**? These are questions that need answering!

Almost every split (approximately twenty-five) within the Churches of Christ cites this particular Scripture to uphold their doctrinal purity and to justify their separation from other believers who do not always see "eye to eye" with the so-called infallible interpreters.[2] If one does not condemn instrumental music in the so-called worship assembly, then, **2 John 9** is cited to justify the "meat cleaver" action against any who would dare disagree with the party cry. If one seeks to have fellowship with

those who employ instrumental music in their worship service, then, **2 John 9** is applied,[3] even though they themselves may not use the instrument.

Since there is much controversy over the phrase "doctrine of Christ" (didach`/ tou` Cristou`) in John's second epistle, it is incumbent upon all Christians to seek to ascertain the meaning employed by the author. Just what did John mean by this particular expression? The purpose of this exposition is to discover the intent of the writer in order that Christians might unite rather than divide over so many trivial positions. To arrive at a correct understanding of how John utilizes this phrase, it is necessary to examine the Greek genitive. Should one interpret "doctrine of Christ" as the "teaching of Christ" (subjective genitive--didach`/ tou` Cristou`) or "teaching about Christ" (objective genitive--didach`/ tou` Cristou`)? The context will have to decide! The immediate surroundings generally serve to exhibit the writer's own definition. The subjective genitive is the most widely advanced belief among the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations. Each division within the Churches of Christ claims this particular Scripture (**2 John 9**) as its own. It just so happens, according to each faction, that the "doctrine of Christ" represents one's own brand of orthodoxy. To disagree with a particular fellowship is tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Imperfection in knowledge

It is imperative that one understands "doctrine of Christ" (didach`/ tou` Cristou`) in **2 John 9** in order to promote unity for which Christ prayed (**John 17**). First, if one interprets "doctrine of Christ" as the teachings of Jesus concerning a worship service (subjective genitive--didach`/ tou` Cristou`), which is the common interpretation of **2 John 9**, then for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is in essence to disagree with the "doctrine of Christ." This point of view equates one's own particular interpretation of the Scriptures concerning church organization and the so-called social worship service as on equal footing with the Word of God itself.[4] When this happens, then, this mishandling of the Word leads to some exegetical problems. For example, no one, not even you, has flawless knowledge of God's written revelation. Paul deals with this "know-it-all" attitude in the Corinthian letter. Christians, according to Paul, can be mistaken about some doctrinal issues and still abide in the "doctrine of Christ." Imperfection in knowledge, "in-and-of-itself," does not mean that one is not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

Listen to the words of Paul as he sets forth this concept of imperfection in knowledge: "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God (**1 Corinthians 8:1-3**). Did you catch this phrase? "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know"? What does this Scripture mean? Is Paul advancing the concept that "blemish" in knowledge is tantamount to damnation? Is he advancing the notion that "deformity" in knowledge is the same as not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ"?

How does one reconcile the following statement of Paul (**Romans 14:1**) to the common (subjective genitive) interpretation of **2 John 9**? One would do well if he or she would listen to Paul as he discusses toleration for the weak in understanding: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**Romans 14:1**). Is this spirit of toleration the same attitude that many Christians practice in dealing with differences in the Christian community? Do you advance the same sprit of mercifulness for imperfection in knowledge that Paul admonished the Romans to adhere to? Again, every believer should give careful attention to the Holy Spirit's words: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (**Romans 14:5**). Do you read this as, "Each one should be fully convinced according to my own mind"? Have you substituted "my" for "his"?

Holiness of Life

A second alternative[5] to the "doctrine of Christ" (subjective genitive) is the teachings of Jesus Messiah to his disciples. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is an illustration of the teachings of Jesus.[6] Yet, this understanding of the phrase cannot be understood in an absolute sense. For instance, how many Christians abide in the "teachings of Christ" in an absolute sense? The wording of **2 John 9** does not allow for departure: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God." Yet, John clearly states that no man is without sin: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (**1 John 1:8**). There are no mitigating circumstances for John. Anyone who does not abide in the "doctrine of Christ" does not have God. Surely John is not writing about sinless perfection in one's life. John, earlier, had rebuked individuals who maintained that they had no sin (**1 John 1:10**). God forbid that any Christian should be guilty of the sin of "perfectionism." No one has perfect knowledge; no one lives a perfect life. Everyone is striving unto perfection is both zones.

Subjective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Produces the Action

What is meant by subjective genitive? The subjective genitive occurs when the noun in the genitive[7] produces the action. To illustrate this principle, it is helpful to review another well-known passage in the Pauline corpus: "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love (ajgavph tou` Cristou`) compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died (**2 Corinthians 5:13-14**). The context clearly indicates that the noun in the genitive (Christ) means the love that Christ has for us, not our love for Christ. The context shows that the phrase (Christ's love) refers to the love which Christ has for us. That is to say, Jesus is the one doing the loving. The noun (Christ-- Cristou`) in the genitive produced the action. It is not the case that determines the point, but the context.

One more illustration is in order to clearly demonstrate the use of the subjective genitive. Paul employs the subjective genitive when he writes about Jesus' preaching: "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ (o; khvrugma jIhsou` Cristou`)" (**Romans 16:25**). Jesus produced the preaching. In other words, the preaching was not about (objective genitive) Jesus, but

rather the proclamation of the good news by Jesus Messiah (jIhsou` Cristou`) Himself. [8]

Objective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Receives the Action

What is meant by the objective genitive? The objective genitive receives the action of the noun. The subjective genitive produces; the objective genitive receives. An example of the objective genitive is found in Jesus' rebuke of the religious authorities: "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit (pneuvmato" blasfhmiva) will not be forgiven" (**Matthew 12:31**).[9] The noun "Spirit" did not produce the action ("blasphemy") against Himself, but rather He received the action. Again, it is the context that determines the meaning, not the case in-and-of-itself.

As stated above, many sincere Christians rely upon **2 John 9** to justify their separation from other believers on the basis that they are not continuing in the "doctrine of Christ." But they have not weighed the context very carefully to determine whether the noun in the genitive produced the action or received the action. In other words, did the genitive (Christ) produce the action (teaching produced by Christ), or is the genitive the receiver of the action (teaching about Christ having come in the flesh)? In seeking a correct answer to the problem of interpretation in **2 John 9**, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that no man has a right to foist into his expositions of Scripture his own dogmatic speculations, or the interpretation of others, and then insist that these conclusions are an essential part of divine revelation. Many Christians misapply this Scripture to uphold their sectarian attitude toward those who do not conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy concerning a so-called worship service.[10] If one approaches the Scriptures with his or her pre-conceived impressions and is anxious to put one's own sense upon the text which coincides with one's own sentiments rather than the thoughts of the author, then one will never be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the passage in question.

SCHOLARSHIP: OBJECTIVE GENITIVE

There are many eminent scholars who understand the genitive "of Christ" in **2 John 9** as objective genitive, not subjective genitive. Thus the phrase, as interpreted by many scholars, means "doctrine about the person of Christ" rather than the "teachings of Christ." The following commentaries illustrate the objective genitive in their interpretation of the context of **2 John 9:**

Rudolph Bultmann

Rudolph Bultmann, who was Professor of New Testament and Early History of the University of Marburg, wrote:

> tou` Cristou` (tou christou, "of Christ") may be taken as a subjective genitive; it is more probable, however, that "of Christ" is an objective genitive, since the author hangs everything on his Christology, i.e., on the doctrine about Christ, as v. 7 shows. Judgment is passed on the disciple of the heretical doctrine by the phrase, qeo;n oujk e[cei (Theon ouk echei, "does not have God"; this corresponds to 1 Jn 2:23, where it is said of "the

one denying the Son," oujde; to;n patevra e[cei (oude ton patera echei, "he does not have the Father"). That means: he stands outside the fellowship of God.[11] (transliteration is mine—RDB)

David Smith

Dr. David Smith's comments on this verse (**2 John 9**) also capture the very heart of John's concern over Gnostic rejection of Jesus having come in the flesh:

> th`/ didach`/ tou` Cristou` (Te didache tou christou, "doctrine of Christ"). The teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn. 4:1-2), i. e., the Messiah, the Savior.[12]

Kenneth Wuest

Also, Kenneth S. Wuest, instructor in New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, expresses his agreement with David Smith:

> "Doctrine" is *didache*, "teaching," namely, that which is taught. Smith says that it is the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. We have a genitive of reference, "teaching with reference to Christ. . . ." The person therefore, who goes beyond the teaching of the incarnation of the Son in human flesh, thus denying the incarnation does not possess God in a saving relationship.[13]

Leon Morris

Leon Morris, Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, paraphrases:

> So if a man does not bring this doctrine (i.e., the doctrine that Christ is God incarnate) he is not to be received.[14]

George Johnston

Another scholarly witness in favor of the *objective genitive* is George Johnston, Principal of United Theological College and Professor of New Testament Studies at McGill Univ., Montreal. He, too, leaves no doubt that the "doctrine of Christ" must refer to the incarnation:

> "The doctrine of Christ" must refer to the point in dispute at 7 and in 1 John; so the genitive is objective.[15]

Lehman Strauss

Lehman Strauss also interprets **2 John 9** as objective genitive:

> Twice in this one verse we read the phrase "the doctrine of Christ." The word *doctrine* (Greek, *didache*) means "teaching." John is not referring here merely to those doctrines which Christ taught, but rather teaching with

> reference to Christ, teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. . . . In view here [2 John 10-11] are the false teachers who come with false teachings. They do not believe nor teach the true doctrine, namely, that Christ is God manifest in flesh. These teachers are not Christians at all. They are not true witnesses of Jehovah; they are actually the devil's witnesses.[16]

Donald Burdick

Donald Burdick, in keeping with his comments on 1 John 2: 24, explains:

> John contrasts the one who goes beyond and the one who remains "in the doctrine of Christ" in verse 9. This doctrine is not teaching which comes from Christ; instead it is the teaching concerning Christ's incarnation which John has already pointed out in verse 7.[17]

E. M. Blaiklock

In concluding the *objective genitive* scholarship, one more scholar is in order to again set forth the context of **2 John 9**. Blaiklock is perfectly correct, as it appears from the context, when he says:

> A Jesus any less than God in flesh appearing cannot be a Saviour. Any doctrine which takes away form Christ's full deity is no doctrine at all. It is antichristian, destructive, ruinous. . . . The "teaching of Christ" is the teaching which stresses the fact that Christ was God's revelation of Himself, the full and final message to man. Any other version of Christ, any distortion of the record, loses not only the Christ John had known but loses God too. Christ was the way to the Father. Lose one and the other is lost. Such warning is timeless.[18]

Even though several eminent scholars have been quoted here, it should be remarked that a nose count is not really worth anything except to illustrate the popularity or respectability of a view. Often one author accepts a plausible-sounding view presented by others without really making a thorough study of the matter. No one person has the opportunity to study every issue with complete thoroughness. Ultimately, only the context matters, not what various people think. In fairness to those who espouse the *subjective genitive* (teachings of Christ), it is necessary to also cite scholars of equal scholarship that postulate that the *doctrine of Christ* is the teaching by Christ, not the teaching about Christ.

SCHOLARSHIP: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

John R. W. Stott

The subjective concept is fully worked out by Stott in his excellent commentary on the epistle of John. He disagrees with Smith, as cited above, that the genitive be interpreted as *objective genitive* and not as a subjective *genitive*:

> At first sight this phrase, literally 'doctrine of the Christ' (NEB), might be taken as meaning 'the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ' (Smith), and this would suit the context well. But the 'usage of the N. T.' (Westcott, Brooke) requires that the genitive be interpreted not as objective, 'the teaching about Christ', but as subjective, 'Christ's teaching'. This no doubt includes what Christ continued to teach through the apostles (cf. Acts i. 1; Col. Iii. 16; Heb. Ii. 3). Such authoritative apostolic doctrine is equivalent to what in his First Epistle John called 'what you heard from the beginning' (ii. 24, RSV; cf. Ii. 7, iii. 11; Jn. Viii. 31; 2 Tim. Iii. 14 and 2 Jn. 5, 6).[19]

Kenneth Grayston

Another scholar objects to the *objective genitive* in his commentary on the Johannine epistles:

> The misleading views of the **deceivers** had little to do with docetism: their refusal, as the elder makes plain, consisted of abandoning the teaching of Christ (*didache tou Christou*). RSV and NEB, but not GNB, JB, and NIV, translate *didache* by **doctrine**, which in modern usage inevitably suggest a formulated christology and implies an objective genitive (teaching about Christ). But the genitive could equally be subjective (teaching given by Christ), referring to Christ's teaching about love both by his words and his actions.[20]

A. T. Robertson

Robertson also advances the idea that the "doctrine of Christ" is the teaching about Christ:

> Not the teaching about Christ, but that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching as the walk of Christ is the standard for the Christian's walk (I John 2:6).[21]

Marvin R. Vincent

Vincent, also a reputable scholar, postulates the "doctrine of Christ" as *subjective genitive:*

> Not the teaching *concerning* Christ, but the teaching of Christ Himself and of His apostles. See Heb. Ii. 3. So according to New Testament usage. See John xviii. 19; Acts ii. 12; Apoc. Ii. 14, 15.[22]

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Many within the Churches of Christ apply a very unique interpretation to **2 John 9**. Generally, the "doctrine of Christ" is associated with a particular brand of orthodoxy. Almost all major divisions within the Churches of Christ cite this verse as their verse. The "doctrine of Christ" is associated with one-cup, non-Sunday school, instrumental music, divorce and remarriage, wine, grape juice, bread breaking, bread

pinching, orphan homes, Bible colleges, etc. Seldom do the journals (Church of Christ) on **2 John 9** ever refer to the "doctrine of Christ" as "loving one another" or adhering to the teachings of Christ as expounded on the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5—7**).[23] A few citations from some of the Church of Christ journals or lectureships should illustrate this utilization of **2 John 9**. To illustrate, it is necessary to cite a few examples to set forth the presupposition.

J. Noel Meredith

In The Sixth Annual Denton Lectures (November 8-12, 1987), Noel Meredith delivered a lecture on "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them (2 John 7-13)." In this lecture he identifies, among other things, the employment of instrumental music in the so-called assembly as tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." He writes,

> The kind of sin under consideration (verse 9) here is one in which one is progressing beyond the doctrine of Christ; he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. When division arose in the church over the use of instrumental music in worship, those who used it styled themselves as "progressives" and they stigmatized those who adhered to the original mode of worship—singing God's praise unaccompanied (Eph. 5:19)—as "non-progressives." There is a very definite fitness in these terms. Instrumental music was not commanded by Christ, no apostle ever sanctioned it, no New Testament writer ever authorized it, and no apostolic church ever practiced it. To use instrumental music in worship is indeed to be "progressive"—to 'progress" beyond the things which are written.[24]

C. A. Smith

Smith, one-cup and non-Sunday school, complains of a visit to one of the "brotherhood meeting houses" in which "brothers and sisters in Christ put on a concert."[25] He complained that one would see the same thing if one attended "the Stamps Quartet, Statesman Quartet, Imperials and etc. (sic), with showmanship, rousing applause, hollering and other gestures."[26] He goes on to say that this did not occur during a "Worship Service," but he continues, "If you can use the church buildings for such carryings on, what would be wrong in our using our buildings for a 'Ladies Lectureship.' 'A Style Show,' or 'A Political Rally?'[27] How does he justify condemnation of the "Sunday afternoon" singing? Listen to his proof text:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (II John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother Lynwood Smith say, several times: " I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good signing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glory and praise God.[28]

One wonders how praising God in song can be classified as "evil deeds." To sing in a quartet is a "dangerous practice," according to Smith. Is **2 John 9** the Scripture that condemns quartet singing in a church building? Is this what John is saying?

Carl M. Johnson

Johnson, another one-cup and non-Sunday believer, calls attention to unity meetings that Ketcherside and others conducted. He erroneously states that "Ketcherside argued that there are no doctrines other than the teachings concerning the person of Christ (that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah) that are serious enough to justify a break in fellowship among believers."[29] Since Ketcherside sought to recapture the spirit of unity for which Jesus prayed, Johnson justifies his separation from Ketcherside through his citation of **2 John 9**:

> The Apostle John warns, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). In an effort to harmonize his own position with John's words, Ketcherside argued that the expression "doctrine of Christ" does not refer to all that Jesus taught personally and through His apostles, but it refers to teaching about the nature, or the deity of Christ only. By limiting the meaning of "doctrine of Christ" in 2 John to teaching about the deity of Christ, Ketcherside and his supporters could extend open fellowship to all "sincere believers" regardless of their doctrine and practice.[30]

Johnson assumes that John is talking about what Johnson believes. But is this the case? What is the context for **2 John 9**?

INSTRUCTIVE PARALLEL OF 1 JOHN 2:22-23 AND 2 JOHN 9

When one is in doubt about the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture that is obscure in the mind of the interpreter, then, one should search for parallel constructions to assist one in correctly handling the Word of Truth. Illumination is often found when one compares Scripture with Scripture. A cardinal rule of explanation is that the *obscure* should be interpreted in the light of the *clear*, never the reverse. The interpreter is bound to consider how the subject lay in the mind of the author and to point out the exact ideas and sentiments intended. To illustrate the above principles of exposition, one should place **1 John 2:22-23** in parallel columns with **2 John 9**. **First John 2:22-23** is an instructive parallel to **2 John 9**.

1 John 2:22-23	2 John 9
Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.	Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ
No one who denies the Son has the Father;	does not have God;
whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.	whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

These two citations constitute a real parallel, that is to say, a parallel of ideas. The Word of God is an organic unity of which all parts are mutually related and are subservient to the whole of God's revelation. The Bible is its own best interpreter. From the parallel passages, one can sense that **2 John 9** is a restatement of **1 John 2:22-23**. The denial that Jesus is the Christ is nothing more or less than a denial of God. To make **2 John 9** apply to instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, handclapping, raising hands, taking money out of the church treasury to assist individuals who are not Christians, etc. is to tear this Scripture out of its context.

GNOSTICISM

If one is to interpret "doctrine of Christ" (KJV) or "teaching of Christ" (NIV) correctly, one must look to the context and to its background. It is apparent, from the context, that John wrote to combat the errors of Gnosticism.[31] The Gnostics were denying the incarnation. They insisted that Christ never had a flesh-and-blood, physical, human body. They also taught that spirit alone is good and matter alone is utterly evil. Given that point of view, then, any real incarnation is impossible.

John's concern with Gnosticism is especially seen in the following verses:

2 John 7	**1 John 4:1-3**
Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.	Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

The Gnostics, who denied Christ having come in the flesh, were not to be received by Christians: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (**2 John 10-11**). Earlier, as cited above, John warns: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (**2 John 7**). These two Scriptures shed light on **verse 9**: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ (didach`/ tou` Cristou`) does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

CONCLUSION

A correct interpretation of **2 John 9** does not advocate looseness in adhering to the teachings of Christ as advanced in the Sermon on the Mount. Both epistles of John

address holiness as characteristic of every believer. The teachings that Jesus commanded in the great commission relate to the Sermon on the Mount and are summed up in this command: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." The "teaching of Christ" in **2 John 9** does not refer to the Sermon on the mount, but rather, to the teaching about Christ's humanity. Christians should not tear **2 John 9** out of its context, and, then, employ this passage as a meat cleaver to hack to death all those who disagree with their party cry for orthodoxy, which originates out of their own "interpretive community."[32]

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

[2] For a classic example of this mindset, see Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ" in ***Seibles Road Church of Christ (November 3, 1996): 1-3, where,*** in his condemnation of Buddy Bell, pulpit minister for the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL, he says (p. 3)***:***

> The apostle John told us exactly how we are to handle false teachers who come to us with their apostasies: *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."* (11 Jn. 9-11).

On page 3, of this same article, he writes: "When I asked Buddy if he believed solos, choirs, and quartets were scriptural in worship, he did not even hesitate with his answer. He told me in no uncertain terms that he believed that the practice of using solos, choirs, and quartets was in his words. "very scriptural." One may obtain a copy of this article by writing to the Seibles Road Church of Christ, 541 Seibles Road, Montgomery, AL 36116.

[3] See C. S. Smith, "Special Music" in ***Old Paths Advocate*** LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5, where he writes:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (11 John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother Lynwood Smith say, several times: "I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glorify and praise God.

[4] Within the Churches of Christ, generally, the "doctrine of Christ" centers around one's concept of the "five acts" of worship. In other words, five rituals performed in a precise manner are imperative for one to abide in the "doctrine of Christ." If one employs instrumental music in worship, then one is not abiding in the

"doctrine of Christ." If one employs Sunday school in the teaching of children and adults, then one is not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If one utilizes individual cups in the communion, then one is not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If one takes money out of the church treasure to assist individuals who are not Christians, then one is not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." The list is almost without measure.

[5] This second alternative is not under consideration from the context—even though John addresses ethical behavior in this second epistle. The context for "doctrine of Christ" appears to have reference to the confession that Jesus had come in the flesh.

[6] John addresses the teachings of Jesus in his Gospel and Revelation, as well as his epistles. No one denies that one can be in fellowship with God and, at the same time, flagrantly flaunt the teachings of Christ in his or her daily life. See **2 John 4-6** in which he deals with loving one another as Jesus commanded. See also **1 John 2: 3-6**. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did," writes John (**v. 6**). It is worthy of notice that even the scholars that advance the subjective genitive, still do not advance the notion of absolute perfection in holiness, on the part of man, as prerequisite to fellowship with God. When they speak of subjective genitive, their writings indicate that they have in mind the teachings of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, not rules and regulations to govern five acts to be performed on Sunday morning.

[7] For an explanation of "case" in Greek, see Ray Summers, ***Essentials of New Testament Greek*** (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 16-18.

[8] See Dana and Mantey, ***A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*** (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), 78.

[9] Ibid.

[10] I do not think this misuse of **2 John 9** is deliberate on the part of those men seeking to be true to the Word of God. In spite of their sincerity, it is necessary to draw attention again to the fact that the whole system of God's revelation must be explained so as to be consistent with itself. In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, one must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

[11] Rudolph Bultmann, ***A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, Hermeneia Series*** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 113.

[12] David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in ***The Expositor's Greek New Testament***, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 202.

[13] Kenneth S. Wuest, ***In These Last Days: Studies in the Greek Text of II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude,*** Wuest's Word Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 206.

[14] Leon Morris, "2 John," in ***The New Bible Commentary: Revised***, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1272.

[15] G. Johnson, "I, II, III John," in Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, ed., ***Peake's Commentary on the Bible*** (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 1039.

[16] Lehman Strauss, ***The Epistles of John*** (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 153, 154.

[17] Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 107.

[18] E. M. Blaiklock, ***Letters to Children of Light: Commentary on First, Second & Third John*** (Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1975), 117, 118.

[19] John R. W. Stott, ***The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary***, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 212.

[20] Kenneth Grayston, ***The Johannine Epistles***, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 154.

[21] A. T. Robertson, ***Word Pictures in the New Testament: General Epistles and Revelation of John***, vol., 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 254.

[22] Marvin R. Vincent, ***Word Studies in the New Testament***, vol., 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 396.

[23] I am not saying that the brethren that apply 2 John 9 to Christians that disagree with them over doctrinal matters would not advance the teaching that one should live a pure life. All I am saying is that this is not generally stated in their expositions of this much abused text

[24] J. Noel Merideth, "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them," in ***Studies in 1, 2, 3 John,*** Sixth Annual Denton Lectures, Dub McClish, ed. (Denton Texas: Valid Publications, 1987), 270.

[25] C. A. Smith, "Special Music," ***Old Paths Advocate LXVV***, no. 3 (March 1996): 4, 5.

[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Carl M. Johnson, "Trojan Horse in the Church, ***Old Paths Advocate*** LXVV, no. 2: 1.

[30] Ibid., 1.

[31] For a thorough analysis of Gnosticism, see William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* **(**Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977; originally published in 1958), 3-20.

[32] Interpretive communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumptions." See M. H. Abrams, ***A Glossary of Literary Terms***, 6th ed . (New York: Harcourt Brace college Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, ***Is There a Text in This Class?*** (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980).

No Private Interpretation: 2 Peter 1:20-21

Thrust Statement: **The prophets of God did not unfold their own imagination as they revealed the thoughts of God.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Peter 1:20-21**

As one approaches **2 Peter 1:20-21**, one is conscious that the traditions of the church make it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Word of God correctly. Since believers are so entrenched in custom, they have difficulties in hearing God accurately. It is not uncommon for individuals to cite this well-known passage to give validity to the notion that one cannot interpret the Word of God. This concept has become normative and has been passed on as an authoritative interpretation of this Scripture. As a result of one's background, it is tough to listen anew to the biblical text. The objective of this essay is to call attention to the context in order to prevent someone from utilizing this text as a jumping off point to uphold his/her brand of orthodoxy. Hopefully, this examination will result in a concrete meaning of the words of the apostle Peter. This passage is just one among many Scriptures that are abused by many well-meaning Christians.

As a young preacher, this author was taught that one could not interpret the Scriptures. Why? Peter says, "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (**1 Peter 1:20**). During my early career with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship, this Scripture reverberated from the pulpits on a regular basis. What this movement really meant was this: One cannot disagree with the traditions advanced by this odd fellowship. In the early seventies, a congregation (cups and classes) of several hundred in Montgomery, AL also castigated this author. He was called on the carpet (1973) for advancing the notion that **Ephesians 5:19** did not condemn instrumental music. An older preacher, who had been brought in by the extreme conservatives, stood up and cited **2 Peter 1:20-21** to inform the congregation

and me that no one could interpret the Scriptures. This misuse of Peter's remarks is still prevalent today.

Within the past week (3-1-01), a minister within the Churches of Christ cited this Scripture against me when I disagreed with his interpretation. He interpreted this Scripture without an awareness of its context. One's misapplication of this pericope (a designated portion or unit of Scripture) can result in devastating consequences in one's relationship with other believers. Frederic W. Farrar (1831-1903) captures graphically the logical consequences of the traditional employment of this text (**2 Peter 1:19-20**):

My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine, therefore you *must* be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my cliques are 'heretics.' All heresy is wicked. All heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[1]

As one approaches this Scripture, one does not always realize how challenging it is to study the Scriptures objectively. One's own social background inevitably influences one's perception of the Oracles of God. Consequently, it is very problematical for one not to study the Word through his/her own lenses. Even though one should research the Bible with an open mind, nevertheless, it is still easier said than done. One seeks to be impartial, even in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles from one's heritage.

Before analyzing the context of Peter's words, this article presents some Scriptures which refute the traditional interpretation of **2 Peter 1:20-21**. An investigation of the negative aspects—what it cannot mean—of this verse should shed light on the positive aspects—what it means—in one's inquiry for understanding. The words of Peter cannot be used to nullify other Scriptures, which encourage the use of one's intellectual abilities to reason. Does he suggest that one does not need to seek out (interpret) the meaning of that which God has revealed through His prophets and apostles? Is Peter saying that one does not interpret the Sacred Writings? Just a perusal of this pericope reveals that Peter is not addressing the subject of explanation in the normal sense of the word. No, Peter is not dealing with the subject of elucidation, but rather he is calling attention to the source of the prophets' writings. Listen to Peter as he places emphasis upon the starting point of the prophetic writings:

> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:20-21**).[2]

Peter is not saying that one should not read the Scriptures with a view of seeking to comprehend. One must apply reason in order to reach certain conclusions based upon the context. If Peter is saying that no one should study the Scriptures in order to clarify his/her conclusions, then one wonders why Paul told Timothy: "Do

your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (**2 Timothy 2:15**).

Again, Luke gives further information about Paul's activities among the Jews during his missionary journeys in which Paul invoked his ability to reason and interpret the Scriptures. One must take for granted that Paul assumed that one could listen to his arguments from Scripture and draw logical conclusions to determine if what he said was true or false. For example, during Paul's visit to Thessalonica, Luke discloses:

> When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. [2] As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. [4] Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (**Acts 17:1-4**).

Once more, Paul's contact with the Bereans also reveal the importance of diligent study: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (**17:11**). If one approaches **2 Peter 1:20-21** with his/her mind already made up, then one will hear only his/her brain waves and never the thoughts of God. One will only confirm his/her own prejudices. Does one interpret Scripture? Yes, everyone does. Did Peter inform his readers that no one could unfold the meaning of Scripture? The answer is an emphatic NO! One must study to rightly divide the Word of Truth. The concern of every exegete is to discover the meaning of the author's mind.

NO PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

Surface reading of Peter's remarks, as found in the KJV, leads one to conclude that one does not interpret Scripture. But other translations help to clarify the intent of Peter as he seeks to get across to his listeners the origin or source of the Old Testament prophetic writings. The following chart with parallel translations should assist one in grasping the intent of the author:

2 Peter 1:20-21 (KJV)	2 Peter 1:20-21 (NIV)
Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. [21]For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.	Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. [21] For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The KJV's translation of the Greek phrase ιςδιψἀ εςπιλυψσεὠ (idias epilusews, "any private interpretation") is somewhat misleading. This phrase is

frequently wrenched from its context to advance the notion that one does not interpret the Scriptures. But this concept is not what Peter addresses in this epistle. Peter is calling attention to the fact that the prophetic writings did not originate with the prophets. In other words, the prophets did not put their own construction upon the God-breathed words they wrote. Peter is not saying that one does not have to explain what has been revealed, but rather he is saying that what the prophets wrote did not stem from the prophets' imaginations, but from the Holy Spirit. A classic example of explaining, or interpreting, a prophet's writing is found in the Book of Acts.

Luke records the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Acts 8:26-40**). The Ethiopian was on his way back home after his pilgrimage to worship in Jerusalem. On his way back, he was reading from **Isaiah 53**. But, in the reading of this text, he did not understand as to whom the prophet had reference. Luke gives the following scenario concerning the eunuch's encounter with Philip, whom the Spirit had sent to enlighten him:

> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. [31] "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (**Acts 8:30-31**).

Luke then informs Theophilus that the Ethiopian was reading **Isaiah 53**. He did not understand as to whom the prophet had allusion: "The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?'" (**Acts 8:34**). Whereupon, Philip began to interpret, or explain, the meaning: "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (**8:35**). As Luke concludes his book, he tells Theophilus that Jesus explained to the His apostles the things spoken about Him in the Law, the Psalms, and in the Prophets:

> [44] He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [45] Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-49**).

The context of **2 Peter 1:20-21** indicates that Peter is addressing the Divine origin of the prophetic messages of the prophets. He is seeking to press home the point that their prophecies did not come about through their own suggestions or inventions. In other words, their prophecies were not from their own opinions, but rather they came forth from a superior beginning—the Holy Spirit. Peter stresses that the prophetic utterances were not "in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (**1:21**). Peter is declaring that the writings of the prophets did not start off in the human mind but were of a higher center. John Mark Hicks, Professor of Doctrine at Harding University Graduate

School of Religion and Professor of Theology, Lipscomb University , has pointed out in his excellent study the crux of Peter's remarks:

The point, then, is clear. The prophets of the Bible did not interpret dreams, signs and visions with their own imagination. On the contrary, they provided their audience with a divine interpretation. . . . The prophets did not speak from their own imagination because their prophecies did not come by their own wills, but by the Holy Spirit who moved them. Verse 20, then says nothing about whether it is right or wrong to interpret scripture. However, it is a strong affirmation that the scripture has a divine origin. The Bible is not the product of human imagination or fables. It is the product of God's saints as they were moved (literally, borne along) by the Holy Spirit.[3]

This Scripture (**1:20-21**) cannot be used to limit an individual's right to read the Word of God for himself/herself in seeking to comprehend the author's intent. Since the prophecies are of Divine derivation, then the reader will approach the Scriptures with reverence. Every child of God will move toward the Word of God with awe. Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) is correct when he writes:

The point of these verses is, in fact, not the interpretation of Scripture but the origin of Scripture; not what Scripture means but what Scripture is. Any use of the context to oppose "private opinion" is therefore entirely wide of the mark.[4]

Michael Green, Registrar at London College of Divinity, too, draws attention to the correct application of this much-abused text: "Peter, then, is talking about the divine origin of Scripture, not about its proper interpretation. If interpretation were his subject in this verse, then verse 21 would be utterly irrelevant to his argument."[5] Statements found in the Old Testament writings also corroborate the words of Peter. For instance, the words of God to Ezekiel concerning false prophets agree with the meaning of Peter's words: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination" (**Ezekiel 13:2**). The false prophets were saying things that had originated within their own minds, not the mind of God. The false prophets issued utterances that were of their own interpretation. On the other hand, Peter affirms that the words of true prophets were not of their own interpretation.

This affirmation of Peter permeates the whole of the Bible. David, too, was aware of God's guidance through the Holy Spirit, which is exactly Peter's point of emphasis. The Chronicler writes about David's plans concerning the construction of the Temple, which involved the Holy Spirit activities in this revelation:

He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things (**1 Chronicles 28:12**).

The Chronicler reveals that the Spirit had put the plans for the building of the Temple into David's mind. Yet again, the Chronicler pronounces: "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan" (**1 Chronicles 28:19**). On another occasion, Zechariah (520 BCE), too, calls attention to the activity of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Words of God to His prophets:

But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. [12] They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets (**Zechariah 7:11-12**).

Even Paul lays claim to his revelation as having had its origin through the Holy Spirit: "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (**1 Corinthians 2:10**). Jesus, too, prepares the disciples for a greater understanding of the Spirit's role in their ministry and says: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. [13] But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (**John 16:12-13**).

God used human instruments to communicate His words to men and women, but these prophets did not create the words out of their own inspiration. Once more, Griffith Thomas correctly captures Peter's remarks: "The meaning, therefore, is no prophecy comes from the prophets' own unfolding, for prophecy did not come by the will of man, but by the Holy Spirit."[6] Peter, in his first epistle, speaks of salvation that God ordained before the foundation of the world, which salvation the angels of God desired to stoop low and look into. The prophets wrote about this salvation, but, nevertheless, they did not fully grasp the time or circumstances in which these events would come to pass. The significant factor about their writings is found in Peter's reference to the role the Holy Spirit plays in this revelation from God:

[10] Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

CONCLUSION

Even though one has the Bible, one still has to explain or interpret in order to understand that which the Holy Spirit revealed to His prophets and apostles. For this very reason, God gave to the Christian community men who were gifted with the gift of teaching. Paul explains this particular grace of God to the Ephesians: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12] to prepare God's people for works of service" (**Ephesians 4:11-12**). An excellent example of this need for teachers, as mentioned above, is the case in point of Phillip who put in plain words **Isaiah 53** to the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Acts 8:26-40**).

For a second time, ones attention should focus on Paul's ministry in Thessalonica as he sought to give explanation or shed light on the Word of God to the Jews in the Synagogues (**Acts 17:2, 4**). Every believer is to engage in the art of exegesis (The use of critical and scholarly procedures to derive the meaning of a passage of Scripture) when he/she reads a text. God demands that every individual utilize his/her mind in one's devotion to God. This concept of the mind's usefulness in

God's kingdom is set forth in Jesus' response to a Pharisee, an expert in the Law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38] This is the first and greatest commandment" (**Matthew 22:37**). The following quote, though lengthy, summarizes succinctly the essence of this essay:

Interpretation is simply man's view of God's revelation. Revelation is what God says, while interpretation is the meaning we give to what He has said. We have a way of confusing the two, identifying what we suppose the scriptures to teach with what they actually teach. Those who deny that they interpret, but simply "take the Bible for what it says," are only kidding themselves. There is no way to make sense of any literature except by ascertaining its meaning. This is true of the simplest sentences, whether in the Bible or out. If we are told "The man made the horse fast," we have to judge by context what it means, for it could refer to hurrying an animal, causing him to go without food, tying him, or hurriedly carving him out of wood or stone. If Jesus tells us that he is "the bread come down out of heaven," we don't just take it for what it says. One who doesn't interpret does nothing. It is important that we realize that we do interpret and that we are *not* infallible interpreters.[7]

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[1] Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," *The Early Days of Christianity*," cited in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[2] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless noted otherwise.

[3] John Mark Hicks, "Divine Interpretation," *Gospel Advocate* 138, no. 6 (June 1996): 23.

[4] Leighton/Thomas, *1 & 2 Peter*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries, Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer, Series Editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1999), 271.

[5] Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 91.

[6] Leighton/Thomas, *1 & 2 Peter*, 271.

[7] Leroy Garrett, "The Inspiration of the Scriptures," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 8 (October 1975): 150.

A Gospel Worth Suffering For

Part 1 of 2

Thrust Statement: **The Gospel of God is a Gospel worth suffering for.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Timothy 1:3-12**

> 3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in **suffering for the gospel**, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. **This grace was given us in Christ Jesus** before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has **brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**. 11 And of **this gospel** I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (**2 Timothy 1:3-12**).[1]

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF GOD

Pisidian Antioch

Paul, in his Roman epistle, marvels at the "gospel of God." For Paul, the Gospel is the message about forgiveness through the atonement of Christ upon Calvary. A cursory glance at the proclamation about Jesus by Paul reveals his concept of what the gospel is all about. In his first missionary journey, Paul discusses the "message of salvation" (**Acts 13:26**) as something that deals with the forgiveness of sins through faith, not works of law. While he and Barnabas were in Pisidian Antioch, Paul addresses the message of salvation this way: "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses (**13:38-39**). When one has a proper concept of the Gospel of Christ, this appreciation should generate courage and enthusiasm within the heart of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly for the Lord. Luke says that God "confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (**14:3**). They soon discovered a plot among the Gentiles and the Jews, along with their religious leaders, to "mistreat them and stone them" (**14:5**). Upon hearing of this clandestine operation by the people, Luke informs his readers that the two men left for Lystra and Derbe (**14:6**). Upon their arrival in these cities and the surrounding country, Paul and Barnabas "continued to preach the good news" (**14:7**).

For Paul, the message of the gospel was a gospel worth suffering for. Is the gospel for you a gospel that is worth suffering for? In order for one to appreciate what the gospel has accomplished for sinful man, it is necessary to briefly review Paul's discourse on this subject in the book of Romans before considering Paul's mistreatment by the Gentiles, the Jews, and the religious leaders. What is the gospel? Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, goes right to the heart of the gospel:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel (eujaggevlion, euaggelion, "glad tidings"), because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel (ejn aujtw'/, en autw) a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:16-17**).

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE NEW AEON

In **Romans 1-8**, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone for the new aeon. Even though he stresses justification by faith alone in the first eight chapters, he, nevertheless, addresses the fact that all Christians are servants of righteousness. God is concerned about holiness in the lives of those to whom He has imputed His righteousness. Not only has God "saved us" through the gospel, but He has "called us to a holy life" (**2 Timothy 1:8-9**). It is through the gospel that God has

destroyed death and brought "life and immortality to light" (**1:10**). But the central focus of the first part of Romans is how a man is placed in a right relationship with God. Thus, Paul's stress is upon "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:17**).

In other words, Paul's emphasis is upon the righteousness of God that is separate and apart from works of law, that is to say, a righteousness that is imputed (credited) to man through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the theme of the first eight chapters of Romans is: How can a man be justified? Is it by works or by faith? After Paul's accent on justification by faith, he demonstrates graphically that holiness is the believer's "spiritual act of worship" (**Romans 12:1**). In Paul's dialogue of freedom from the control of sin in **Romans 6**, he develops the necessity of holiness in the life of every believer. In fact, he writes: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**6:22-23**).

Thus, Paul begins chapter twelve with emphasis upon holy living, not for justification, but rather, as the means of presenting one's body as a living sacrifice, which is one's worship. For Paul, holiness is not the cause of justification; but rather, holiness is the fruit that flows from justification. Once an individual is freed from God's wrath through Jesus Christ **(Romans 5:9**), Paul then puts emphasis on the behavior of those who through faith are righteous. Christians are to be pure in their daily walk with the Lord. Paul also gives emphasis to purity as a way of life in his letter to Titus:

> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. [15] These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you (**Titus 2:12-15**).

For Paul, redemption means a change of masters: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (**Romans 6:18**). Paul labors this point about the new life in the new aeon: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness" (**6:22**). Paul employs the word "righteousness" in two different senses in the Roman letter—God's righteousness (**1:17**) and holiness (**6:19**) as one's way of life.

Paul is stressing holiness—right living—as a way of life. He, no doubt, reflects upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as he deals with ethical behavior. In the now famous Sermon, Jesus says,

> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will

> be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:18-20**).

"Righteousness" as employed by Jesus (**5:20**) deals with decent performance. This kind of conduct is also the subject of **Romans 6** and **12**. If one wants to understand how one should carry out his/her behavior, then one must read the Sermon on the Mount.

Righteousness of God: Romans 1:17

But the word "righteousness" (dikaiosuvnh, dikaiosuvnh) in **Romans 1:17** is much more comprehensive than personal holiness or even correct teaching. This righteousness is the righteousness of the new aeon—the righteousness of God revealed through Jesus Christ. This righteousness in **Romans 1:17** is called the "righteousness of God" because His grace provides it. In other words, the "righteousness of God" is God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus our Lord. When Paul articulates the "righteousness of God" in **Romans 1:17**, he is not using the word "righteousness" as an activity on the part of man but as an activity on the part of God. Paul is saying that God gives us Christ as "righteousness." This "righteousness" is not the "righteousness of law," that is to say, law keeping, but rather the "righteousness" that belongs to God Himself. This imputed (credited) righteousness causes Paul to say: "The righteous will live by faith" (oΣ δεΨ διψκαιö εςκ πιψστεϖ ζηψσεται, &o dikaios ek pistews zhsetai).

The Law of God Cannot Redeem

The law of God can never, under any circumstances, be a way of salvation, not even for one "in Christ." Paul, in his letter to the Churches in the province of Galatia, discusses the law and justification. He pinpoints the issue in this manner: "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith'" (**Galatians 3:11**). This state is identical to the citation in **Romans 1:17**. Again, Paul stresses that justification is by faith, not by works of the law:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**2:15-16**).

Paul was ever conscious that "the righteous will live by faith," not by perfection in one's walk with God. For example, Paul clearly sets forth the inner conflict within his own being as he seeks to put into practice the commands of the law, but he bemoans the fact that he fails miserably. Listen to his autobiography as he explains his dilemma:

> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.
> [15] I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. [16] And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is

good. [17] As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. [18] I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. [19] For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. [20] Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. [21] So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. [22] For in my inner being I delight in God's law; [23] but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. [24] What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (**Romans 7:14-25**).

Paul differentiates between the "righteousness of law" and the "righteousness of faith." He knew that salvation must be by grace: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (**Galatians 2:21**). If one is to have a correct understanding of the "righteousness of God," without law, it is essential that one distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is to say, a righteousness that is done for us, not in us. This righteousness from God *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith, not good deeds performed, not through works of the law, nor through a correct understanding of all Scripture.

Imputed Righteousness: Outside the Believer

For Paul, the righteousness that justifies is imputed righteousness. But what is imputed righteousness? Imputed is from the Greek word logivzomai (logizomai), which means, "to put down to a person's account." Thus, imputed righteousness is entirely outside the behavior of the believer. It is the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus. Adding anything to this substitutionary work of Christ and calling it our righteousness by faith is blasphemy. Christians work from justification, not to it. Justification is the mother of sanctification (aJgiasmov", &agiasmos, "separation of the believer from evil things and ways"). Before justification, man was the "servant of sin," but after justification, he is a "servant of righteousness" (**Romans 6:16-22**).

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Imputed righteousness is what the gospel is all about. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ meant to do? What is it supposed to achieve? Is the gospel merely to forgive sinners and deliver them from hell? No! The end of the gospel is to reveal an answer to Job's question: "How can a mortal be righteous before God?" (**Job 9:2**). The business of the gospel is to make individuals righteous in God's sight, to make people acceptable to God, to enable individuals to stand in the presence of one's Holy God. How does God accomplish this feat? It is through the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus. It is only by the fact that one is in Christ that one can stand in the presence of a Holy God. Christ has become for everyone all that God requires of one. Paul states this fact very succinctly in his first letter to the Corinthians: "It is because of him that you are in

Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**).

The Central Purpose of the Gospel: Justification

Justification is the central purpose of the Gospel of God. In the gospel, God reveals righteousness apart from law. The "righteousness apart from law" is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness from God does not make void the just requirements of the law; rather it establishes the law's goal. Paul reminds the believers at Rome of this very truth: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (**Romans 3:31**). It is this righteousness apart from the law that Paul calls the "righteousness of God." Thus, the status of righteousness that the law sought to bring about is now realized in anyone who accepts Jesus as God's appointed means of salvation. To restate this truth more concisely, "the righteousness of God" comes to one through faith in Jesus.

Can a man be just with God through law keeping? No! If one is "under law," any law—Old Testament or New Testament—then before one can be placed in a right relationship with God, the law of God must be kept perfectly in every respect. James, brother of Jesus, explains obedience to the law this way: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (**James 2:10**). The law condemns. When one is under law, then one is under God's Wrath (**Romans 5**), under the dominion of Sin **(Romans 6**), under the curse of the Law (**Romans 7**), and under condemnation (**Romans 8**).

Freedom is obtained "through" and "in" Jesus. One observes that Paul alternates between "through" and "in" in **chapters 5**, **6**, **7**, and **8** of **Romans**. In Paul's discussion of freedom from wrath in **Romans 5**, he says, "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life **through** (diaV, dia, "through, on account of, because of") Jesus Christ our Lord" (**5:20-21**). But in **chapter 6**, Paul sets forth the concept of freedom from the dominion of sin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life **in** (ejn, en, "in") Christ Jesus our Lord" (**6:23**).

Again, in **chapter 7**, Paul calls attention to the fact that believers are free from the law. How does this occur? Listen to Paul once more as he exclaims: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—**through** Jesus Christ our Lord! (**7:24-25**). Then in **chapter 8**, he again calls notice to the concept of freedom from condemnation. How does this occur? Listen to Paul as he once more stresses that it is "in" Jesus: "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is **in** Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Romans 8:39**). Redemption is "in" and "through" Jesus Christ our Lord.

How can man escape the *wrath* of God, the *dominion* of sin, the *curse* of the law, and *condemnation*? There is only one way; namely, "in and through Jesus Christ." This is what the gospel is all about. This is the whole glory of the gospel. Why did Paul rejoice in the gospel? Again, as stated earlier, Paul gives us his answer:

"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**Romans 1:17**). In other words this righteousness from God begins with faith and ends with faith—ejk pivstew" eij" pivstin, ek pistews eis pistin, "from faith to faith." Paul develops this theme of God's righteousness in the tenth chapter of Romans:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. [5] Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." [6] But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) [7] "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (**Romans 10:1-11**).

God's Righteousness Through Faith

In one's confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and belief in His resurrection, one receives the "righteousness" that belongs to God. Even though one is justified by faith—in and through Jesus—God does not undo the just requirements of His moral law, but rather, He upholds his demands through Jesus. In one's acknowledgment and acceptance of Jesus as God's way of salvation (**John 14:6**), God imputes, that is to say, God credits to that individual who puts his/her trust in Jesus the righteousness of His Son. Paul captures this credited righteousness in **Romans 4** in very concise language:

> Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (**4:20-25**).

Where justification is exalted, the law of God is elevated. Justification by faith makes the law and the sinner friends: "For in my inner being I delight in God's law" (**7:22**). Every Christian's delight should be in God's law. The law of God tells His people how to live to His honor and to His glory:

> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. [9] The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (**13:8-10**).

Even though Paul expresses his delight in the law of God, he does not delight in the law of God for justification. Why? Listen to Paul as he contemplates the terrifying aspects of the law:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**Romans 3:19-20**).

He says that the law of God shuts every man's mouth, no man can boast. But the apostle does not leave man in despair; he gives hope to sinful man. Having said this, Paul reveals how a man can be righteous before a holy God. Immediately, he develops this righteousness from God, apart from law. Paul's assessment of man's situation is full of hope, he writes:

> But now (NuniV deV, nuni de) a righteousness from God apart from law (cwriV" novmou, cwris nomou, "without law"), has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

"BUT NOW"—THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

"But now" is the heart of the gospel of Christ. This "but now" is how faith answers the indictment of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—"but now." No man ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of his holy law. Well, is there hope for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The Apostle answers these questions. How? "But now!" Yes, God's grace provides the righteousness his law demands. The Gospel is about God's activity of redemption for man in Christ Jesus. "But now" is man's defense against the curse of law. This is the heart of the gospel.

The Righteousness of God: External to Man

The gospel tells us of a righteousness from God and of a righteousness provided by God that is *in* and *through* our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus has satisfied

the law of God on man's behalf. He fulfilled the law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is *external* to man, a righteousness that is *alien* to man, a righteousness that is *passive* to man, and a righteousness that is *imputed* to man. This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it. This imputed righteousness was so startling that Peter speaks of this awe and wonder of God's scheme of redemption as even penetrating the angelic host:

> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, [9] for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. [10] Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, [11] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. [12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look (parakuvyai, parakupsai, "to stoop to look") into these things (**1 Peter 1:8-12**).

God unfolds this alien righteousness and displays it in the gospel of his crucified Son; Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the gospel. Justification is extended to man freely. It is in this vein that Paul writes: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely (dwreaVn, dwrean, "a gift") by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:23-24**).

Jesus in one of His discourses to the disciples speaks of the hatred of the world toward Him: "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason (dwreaVn, dwrean, "without a cause")" (**John 15:25**). Paul employs the same word (**Romans 3:24**) that Jesus employs in **John 15:25**. One is justified "without a cause" on the part of God; salvation is a gift. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals his way of redeeming sinners and upholding his holiness at the same point in time. Paul poignantly captures this truth when he pens:

> God presented him a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:25-26**).

IMPUTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Justification by faith is a legal transaction related to God's law and to divine jurisprudence. The idea of imputation (righteousness that is credited to man) is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary atonement (Christ died as a substitute for man). Imputation and substitutionary atonement of Christ stand together. The ultimate act of salvation is in the Christ event. Thus, it is fitting to call God's redemptive act in

Christ "the righteousness of God." As stated earlier, this righteousness is *furnished* by God, *devised* by God, and *made obtainable* by God. It is God's salvation from beginning to end. The prophets testify to this event. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:6**)." Also, Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, writes:

> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. . . . After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:5, 11-12**).

Righteousness: Imputed Through Faith

There is a certain amount of repetition in this study of imputed righteousness. This repetition is necessary since this is a subject that is not readily understood by many believers. Not only is the "righteousness of God" (**Romans 1:17**) that which belongs to His Son Jesus, but this "righteousness" comes to every individual through faith in Jesus. Paul, in **1:17**, is not talking about acts of righteousness, or the doing of good deeds, but rather the issue of "imputed righteousness"—a righteousness bestowed upon man through faith in His Son Jesus.

Paul speaks of this righteousness as coming from God, not man; he describes it as "God's righteousness." Very succinctly, he writes about a "righteousness from God, apart from law" (**3:21**). This "righteousness from God" is Christ's faithfulness, truthfulness, and obedience to God's law. These attributes of Christ are *credited* to the believer as his own through faith. Paul uses *credited* eleven times in chapter four of Romans. One should consider the following passages from **Romans 4** to get a feel for this word credit (λογιψζομαι, logizomai, "impute"):

> David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:[7] "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. [8] Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (**4:6-11**).

CONCLUSION

The central thought in justification is that—although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (**4:9-19**)—God declares him righteous through the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus Christ. Jesus is "our righteousness." Paul aptly stresses the centrality of the gospel: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). Jesus is our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. This is the only means by which sinful man can stand before his God.

One can only boast in the Lord, not his works of righteousness. Jesus is "our everything." Is it any wonder that Paul was willing to suffer for the Gospel of God? If one properly understands the Gospel, then one will witness an increase among God's people. Is the Gospel of Christ a Gospel worth suffering for in your own life? Are you seeking to share your faith in Jesus with others? Do you really understand what the Gospel of Christ is all about? If so, then one will behold an outreach in his/her ministry.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Who Are the Heretics?
--Titus 3:10--

Thrust Statement: **Paul warns Christians against having a divisive spirit of intolerance for those who do not have flawless knowledge.**

Scripture Reading:

> But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. [10]A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; [11]Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (**Titus 3:9-11**).[1]

Titus 3:10 is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify separation from other Christians over controversial interpretations of certain Scriptures. This passage is wrenched from its context to condone the charge of *heresy* against anyone who departs from the so-called watchword of the church fathers. The word *heresy* is frequently associated with wrong beliefs. For instance, if one believes that it is appropriate to praise God with instrumental music, then one is guilty of heresy, at least to the acappella fellowship. If one maintains that individual communion cups are correct, then the one-cup Christians label the cups users as *heretics*. Why? Because they supposedly are guilty of "false doctrine." This list of violations among the various segments of the Churches of Christ is almost ad infinitum. The infringements on the so-called new law change according to the dictates of the group to which one is attached.

The words *heresy* (αἱρεσϊ &airesis) and *heretic* (αιΣρετικοψ &airetikos) are two words that are frequently applied to those who maintain unorthodox teaching. Christians are frequently called *heretics* and charged with *heresy* when they do not subscribe to the tenets of a particular party. Even though one may be true to the gospel (Jesus as God's way of salvation), still, in spite of his/her adherence to the good news

of God's redemption through Christ, unless one holds to the "odd" interpretations of a specific fellowship, then one is still castigated as *heretic*. One may believe in God, one may believe in the deity of Jesus, one may believe in the Holy Spirit, one may believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and one may believe that God's Word is applicable to every area of one's life, still it is not uncommon for some believers to refer to other believers as *heretics* or charge them with *heresy* when their beliefs differ from the status quo of an exacting faction.

THOMAS B. WARREN (1920—2000)

This author (Dallas Burdette), in his early ministry, applied **Titus 3:10** to any fellowship of believers that refused to interpret the Scriptures in harmony with the religious leaders of the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship. Today, for one to express a view that fails to agree with another point of view as advanced by some demanding body of believers is sufficient to deserve the epithet of *heresy*. There are approximately twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. Each splinter group claims this passage as its own. For instance, the late Thomas B. Warren's quotation of this passage is a classic example of the misuse of **Titus 3:10** to justify separation from the so-called erring Christian.[2] According to Warren's view, if one espouses what Warren considers to be "false doctrine," then this person is a *heretic*:

> To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine. The man who persists in the promulgation of false doctrine—even in the face of efforts to persuade him to repent—must be rejected (refused). Thus, we conclude from the passage: (2) It is possible to be a heretic; (b) Such people should be admonished by faithful brethren; (c) When a heretic will not repent, he must be rejected (refused, withdrawn from) by faithful brethren.[3]

One must not question his sincerity in his application of **Titus 3:10**, but his subjective interpretation and dogmatic approach to this passage undermines and denies the very Scriptures he wanted to uphold. In fact, this Scripture, as cited by many godly men and women, would be more applicable to them than to someone else who has misinterpreted some passage of Scripture. In other words, the word *heretic* has to do with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind. To the unsuspecting, there appears to be truth to his explanation. For example, one can agree that if one is a *heretic*, then one must be refused. These individuals—men or women—must be admonished by other Christians to desist in their behavior of factiousness. And, finally, this one must be shunned if he/she continues in this kind of unethical behavior that is disruptive to the unity of the Spirit. Paul also dealt with this kind of behavior in **Romans 16:17**.[4]

One can also grant this analysis, but, on the other hand, one cannot see eye to eye with Warren when he says, "To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine." He is employing a definition that is anachronistic (existing or happening outside its historical order). The implications that he draws from **Titus 3:10** are not necessarily true. His essay is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, that is, to the effect that the apostle Paul had Warren's philosophy in mind when he wrote to Titus. This author (Dallas Burdette) has not

hesitated to reject ancient doctrines when new evidence demonstrates that the traditional interpretation is untenable.

It appears, so it seems to this author, that Warren's rationalization is similar in nature to the position maintained by Catholic and Anglican Churches during the 14th through the 18th centuries as well as the Spanish Inquisition. The believers in these movements inflicted torture beyond belief over the misunderstanding of the words heresy and *heretic*. Twentieth century Christians cannot burn individuals at the stake or drown them in rivers, but, nevertheless, they can still instill stark terror in the hearts of many with the word *excommunicate*. The explanation that Warren assigns to **Titus 3:10** is the description that is generally doled out to the words *heresy* and *heretic*. The *Webster's University Dictionary* defines these two words as:

> **Heresy**. **1a**. An opinion or doctrine in conflict with established religious beliefs, esp. dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. **b.** Adherence to such dissenting opinions or doctrine. **2a.** An unorthodox or controversial opinion or doctrine, as in philosophy, science, or politics. **b.** Adherence to such unorthodox or controversial opinion.[5]
> **Heretic. 1.** One who hold or advocates controversial opinions, esp. one who publicly opposes the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.[6]

It is not uncommon for Christians within the Churches of Christ to refuse fellowship with other believers when they refuse to adhere to an opinion that is officially accepted as dogma by their particular group. The reason for the negative response is based upon the label *heretic*, which he/she must be accused of in order to preserve the prevailing attitude of the defenders of the faith. Thus, the term *heretic* is indiscriminately associated with the horrible word *heresy*, which, as stated above, brings to mind the *heresy* trials of the Spanish Inquisition. John R. W. Stott is quite correct in observing that the traditional interpretation is anachronistic:

> Warn a *divisive* person, Paul writes. The Greek word is *hairetikos*, which the AV and (surprisingly NEB translate "heretic'. But his is an anachronism, for the word had not yet assumed this meaning. *Hairesis* means a sect, party or school of thought, and is applied in the Acts to Sadducees, Pharisees and Christians. *Hairetikos*, however, meant somebody who is 'factious' (RSV), 'contentious' (REB) or 'divisive' (NIV).[7]

Allen Bailey

Another sincere writer, Allen Bailey (second cousin of this author), of the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion, cites this verse as well as many other passages in his essay against so-called false teachers. Just a cursory glance at his many citations reveals that he would consider Warren a *heretic*, that is, one guilty of *heresy*.[8] One almost stands in disbelief as one encounters the individuals whom he labels as false teachers in his study. The definition that Warren and Bailey assign to these words through their writings does not come from the Bible, but rather from the traditions of men. In this lengthy study, Bailey cites twenty-eight Scriptures to give validity to his

castigation of men who do not concur with his particular brand of orthodoxy. In this numerous accumulation of Scripture references, he also quotes **Titus 3:10**.

In this essay, he has a subtitle—False Doctrines of the Twentieth Century—which takes in the "promise-keepers Movement,"[9] "Catholic Evangelical Accord,"[10] "Calvinism,"[11] "Grace-Faith-Works Issue,"[12] "Liberal Views on Fellowship,"[13] "The Truth About the Church of Christ—Hugh F. Pyle," [14] "Televangelists (T. V. Evangelist Pat Robertson and the 700 club, Oral Roberts, Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, Robert Tilton, etc.),"[15] "Pastor Pet Peters,"[16] "John McArthur,"[17] "J. Vernon McGee," [18] and on and on he goes. **Titus 3:10** is just one of twenty-eight Scriptures he cites to give soundness to his charge of "False Teachers." He writes: "To this concern, and all others, I sound the alarm—*beware of false teachers*!"[19]

Under the umbrella of **Titus 3:10**, he includes those within the Churches of Christ that seek a wider fellowship with other believers; anyone who is willing to cross the dictates of a few self-appointed watchdogs for the orthodoxy of a small segment of God's people. And furthermore, he brings in those who teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus, not works. One must take for granted, even though **Titus 3:10** does not employ the words "false teachers," that Bailey considers the word *heretic* as synonymous with "false teachers," which in turn is identified as "false teaching." This particular Scripture is cited to condemn Christians, such as the late Warren, who used individual communion cups and participated in Sunday school. This philosophy about **Titus 3:10** and its application is not new with Bailey; he cut, as it were, his eyeteeth on this passage.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit did not employ the traditional meaning generally assigned to this word *heretic*. In the New Testament, the word *heresy* does not suggest truth or error—good or bad. The English word *heresy* is anglicized from the Greek αἱρεσῐ &airesis. E. P. Gould puts it graphically:

> "Heresies" is a transliteration, but not a translation, of the Greek word, which has come over into the English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning.[20]

The Greek expression &airesis did not originally denote anything good or bad; but rather, the word simply meant "choice" or "the act of choosing." The Septuagint (LXX) uses &airesis to refer to the gift that one chooses to offer to God (**Leviticus 22:18**). Also, Moses employs &airesis to describe the choice of Simeon and Levi (**Genesis 49:5**). One quickly observes that in the LXX, the word may relate to choices, which may be good or bad. Both Paul and Peter employ this word as Partyism (**1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1; Titus 3:10**). God condemns this kind of attitude—a stance of divisiveness, or factiousness. Luke also uses this same word but not in a bad sense. For instance, he writes, "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party (αἱρεσῐ &airesis) of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy" (**Acts 5:17**).[21] Later, Luke gives a brief overview of Paul's trial

before Felix in which the word *hairesis* is employed. At this trial, Tertullus, a lawyer, brought charges against Paul with the following words: "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (αιΣρεψσεϖ &airesews)" [**24:5**].

At a glance, it might appear that the "Nazarene sect" is used in a bad sense, but the derogatory remarks by Tertullus are not against the sect, as such, but against Paul as a "ringleader" of the Nazarene sect. Paul's response to the accusation is an argument that he is loyal to the Jewish religion:

> My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. [13] And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. [14] However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect (αἱρεσιν & airesin). I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets (**24:12-14**).

Again, Luke records Paul's arrival at Rome and his request to meet with the leaders of the Jews. In the course of the conversation, they informed Paul that they had not heard anything bad about him. The leaders then informed Paul that they wanted to know his views concerning the sect (αιΣρεψσεϖ &airesews) that so many were talking against (**28:17-22**). Paul considered himself a loyal and orthodox Jew until his dying day. Yes, Christians today are member of the "Nazarene sect," but, at the same time, God condemns sects within THE SECT.

The Scriptures give no indication that the word *hairesis* has anything to do with opinion or doctrines, whether true or false. One can be guilty of *hairesis* even with the truth (see **Romans 16:17**). The word simply means sect or party, whether good or bad, or indifferent. Within Judaism, there were several sects, but with Christianity there are parts but not parties (see **1 Corinthians 3:1-23**). Within the Christian community, every believer is to make every effort to protect the "unity of the Spirit." Listen to Paul as he makes his plea for harmony within the body of Christ:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (**Ephesians 4:1-7**).

Every sect within the Nazarene sect must surrender its opinions as a bond of union. If one surrenders his opinions, what remains to unite Christians? The answer is found in the gospel facts alone. Paul builds his case for maintaining the unity of the Spirit upon seven "ones" (**4:1-7**). This alone can unite Christians. It goes, almost with saying, that "the faith" is public property, but, on the other hand, opinions are private property. The Scriptures declare that there is "one faith" (Jesus is the object of this one

faith), but nowhere does it state there is "one opinion." Alexander Campbell captures the very essence of Paul's admonition to Titus with the following succinct words:

> I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ. . . . If he will dogmatize and become a factionist, we reject him—not because of his opinions, but because of his attempting to make a faction, or to lord it over God's heritage.[22]

THE HERETIC AND THE FALSE TEACHER

The word *heretic* (αιΣρετικοψ &airetikos) appears but once in the New Testament (**Titus 3:10**). The NIV translates this verse: "Warn a divisive person (αιΣρετικοΨν α[νθρωπον &airetikon anqrwpon) once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." The NASB translates this verse as: "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning"[23] The NCV renders this passage: "After a first and second warning, avoid someone who causes arguments."[24] This person of whom Paul speaks is an individual who is the head of a faction. He or she is the promoter of a sect or party within the body of Christ, which is one. Paul is saying that the *heretic* is one who has decided that he/she is right and everyone else is wrong to the point of creating division over his/her opinion or opinions. The following extract from William Barclay may help to explain the original meaning of the word *heretic:*

> The English word heresy is to all intents and purposes a transliteration of the Greek word *Hairesis*. In English, heresy is a word with a distinctively bad meaning; it denotes a belief which is contrary to orthodoxy and to true doctrine. But in Greek *Hairesis* is not necessarily a bad word for it means either an act of choosing or a choice. . . . It is the breaking up of the unity of the Church into cliques who shut their circle to all but their own number. . . . There is all the difference in the world between believing that we are right and believing that everyone else is wrong. Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; unyielding intolerance is a sin.[25]

One may be correct in his interpretation of the Scriptures and still be a *heretic* in the biblical sense of the word. The Christians at Rome—whether weak or strong—were encouraged to allow for discrepancies of opinions concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain days. He went right to the very heart of the spirit of intolerance in seeking to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. For instance, Paul began his analysis of diversity existing among the members of the Christians at Rome with a startling statement: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**Romans 14:1**). Then Paul succinctly asked: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**14:4**). Following his discussion of variations within the body of believers at Rome, he issues the following orders: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**15:7**). In other words, Christ had accepted all of them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge.

Thus, Paul is saying that they should accept one another in the same fashion that Christ accepts them—"warts and all." Even though some were mistaken in their knowledge, still they were not accused of *heresy*. If on the other hand, the "knowing ones" persisted in destroying the unity of the body of Christ in order to enforce unity-in-conformity, then Paul would have called them *heretics*. Paul, in concluding this epistle (Romans), issues a warning toward those who were not willing to make allowances for irregularity in discernment of God's Word: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (**16:17**). What had they learned? One should reread chapters 14 and 15 to understand what they had learned. These two chapters deal with the spirit of toleration in spite of differences in opinions. For those not willing to exercise patience with those who understood things differently, Paul says that one should keep an eye on those who insist that it is my way or no way. This mental mind-set is what Paul confronts in his letter to Titus. The context of **Titus 3** reveals that Paul is dealing with individuals who insist that it is my way or no way at all.

Paul, too, had to confront the same mental attitude in Corinth concerning imperfection in understanding the true nature of the Godhead. Paul writes six chapters (**8—13**) dealing with dissimilarity within the congregation. He begins **chapter 8** with words that may possibly have been upon the lips of some of the believers: "Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge" (**1 Corinthians 8:1**). William Barclay uses the following pregnant words in his comments on this passage:

> Nothing ought to be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything ought to be judged from the point of view of love. The argument of the advanced Corinthians was that they knew better than to regard an idol as anything; their knowledge had taken them far past that. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a man arrogant and feel superior and look down unsympathetically on the man who is not as far advanced as himself. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. But the consciousness of intellectual superiority is a dangerous thing. Our conduct should always be guided not by the thought of our own superior knowledge, but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we must refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.[26]

Paul calls attention to the arrogance of so-called intellectual superiority by a few: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know (**8:1b-2**). How does God react toward the man/woman who loves Him, but still does not get the picture fully? Is God like a motorcycle cop riding around waiting for the least infraction of the law in order to zap him/her? How should one react to imperfection in knowledge? How many Christians comprehend the teachings of God as they ought? Paul says that the person who thinks he/she has a handle on everything is just barking up the wrong tree.

Again, how does God feel about someone who is lacking in "picture perfect" information? Are there any mitigating circumstances in which God makes allowances? Listen to Paul as he nips the arguments of the "knowing ones" in the bud: "But the

man who loves God is known by God" (**8:3**). This is one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture. If a man loves God, says Paul, God knows this man. This statement goes against the grain of the present day philosophy of unity-in-conformity. Paul advances the notion of unity-in-diversity in First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus. Paul correctly says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (**8:6**). Yes, there is "one God" and "one Lord." But did everyone appreciate this truth? Listen to Paul once more: "But not everyone knows this" (**8:7**). Where these folks still Christians and in fellowship with God and Christ? Again, Paul gives the proper response as to how Christians should treat one another over this controversial issue that threatens to divide the unity of the Spirit:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge (**8:9-11**).

Earlier, in this essay, attention was called to six chapters in First Corinthians in which Paul dealt with diversity within the Corinthian congregation. After developing his thoughts, one observes the master builder reaching the climax of his literary masterpiece of unity within the body of Christ. He does this in the **thirteenth chapter** of **1 Corinthians**. This chapter is generally disconnected and isolated from its context of concreteness and interpreted with abstraction—nothing to really sink the teeth into. How does Paul deal with this imperfection in knowledge? The answer is love. The same response that he set forth in **chapter 8**: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God" (**vv. 2-3**). Yet again, one should observe verse two again: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know." Now, pay attention to Paul as he concludes his analysis of discrepancies within the fellowship:

> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (**13:12-13**).

How does one deal faithfully with this subject of "Who Are the Heretics?" without repeating the same themes time and again? Repetition is sometimes necessary in order to cause individuals to reread the text anew. The task of discarding the underbrush of traditions heaped upon **Titus 3:10** is a monumental undertaking. One should remember that repetition is a good teacher. In the early 70s, my Greek professor taught this author that there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

The biblical *heretic* is the man/woman who has a sectarian spirit. The Churches of Christ, as a whole, have failed to consider the context of **Titus 3:10** and the "common sense" interpretation of the real world, not in the fantasy world. Even though one may argue that "common sense" is not a good guide in the interpretation of Scripture, still, if something goes against the grain ("common sense"), then one ought

to reexamine his/her own presuppositions to see if they are in harmony with the Word of God. If something does not have a "ring of truth," one should at least go back to the drawing board to reexamine his/her preconceived notions.

An illustration of "common sense interpretation" is found in the writings of Carl Ketcherside: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus."[27] For a second time, no one has expressed the danger of the party spirit with its desire to hold back growth in knowledge better than Ketcherside: "Every faction seeks to freeze knowledge at an arbitrary partisan level, and every such faction does it by skimming off the brains."[28] One more example of "common sense interpretation" from Ketcherside should suffice to nail the coffin shut on those who wish to make conformity the criterion by which fellowship is extended to believers:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[29]

One of the founders of the denominational Church of Christ addresses this issue of various levels of knowledge in trying to correct the sectarian spirit in his own day.[30] Alexander Campbell paints a picture with words that captures "common sense interpretation," mentioned earlier, in describing the deplorable conditions of disunity within the Christian community. The Christians in his day were just as divided over issues as the Churches of Christ are today. Listen to Campbell's timely words of warning:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription [to denounce or condemn—RDB] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest,

rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.

If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[31]

The context of **Titus 3:10** does not teach that one who fails to subscribe to certain rules and regulations that other Christians seek to impose are guilty of *heresy*. One is not a *heretic* simply because he/she cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a particular party. Christians can be mistaken without being rebellious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus. One's position on the use of individual containers to distribute the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, Bible classes for teaching the Word of God to different age groups, chartered homes in which to rear and care for orphans, belief in pre-millennialism, praising God with instruments of music, and so on, does not, in and of itself, constitute *heresy* or the epithet *heretic*.[32]

No one who is honestly mistaken about some matters of scriptural interpretation is a *heretic*. For one to be a *heretic*, one must make a test of fellowship out of his/her opinions and then attempt to establish a party to promote or protect that view. The *heretic* is one who brands and stigmatizes humble seekers after truth whose character is above reproach and whose only crime is that they cannot be of the same mind in every point of view or opinion held by those who have assumed the role of infallible interpreters. This mind-set of intoleration for various viewpoints is the subject matter that Paul warns against in his epistles—First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a citation from Leroy Garrett captures eloquently the role of so-called *heretics* down through the centuries:

The roll call of heretics in the history of thought is more honorific than it is infamous. The prophets who were stoned as heretics life buried in tombs that are garnished by later generations. The scientist who were once silenced and excommunicated for their heterodoxy are today among the heroes admired by every schoolboy who studies the history of nations. The philosophers who were once exiled and poisoned as schismatics are now among the respected names in the annals of thought.[33]

[1] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[2] Even though Thomas B. Warren has gone on to be with the Lord, nevertheless his writings still remain. Since he is still respected as a scholar, it is necessary to scrutinize his writings to see if he followed the context in his application of certain passages in seeking to give validity to his actions of separation from other believers who could not concur with him in his interpretation of many Scriptures. He, like all of us, brings a certain amount of baggage to the Scriptures, which is inevitable. Still, one has to be conscious of his/her presuppositions. My remarks about his essay have nothing to do with my respect for this man whose life was dedicated to Jesus Christ. In my opinion, he mistakenly applied certain Scriptures to uphold his exclusivist concept of fellowship. I, too, did this for many years. So, I can sympathize with his struggles in wanting to be true to the Word of God. My analysis of his application of Titus 3:10 is not to condemn, but rather to help bring about a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures in order that the unity for which Jesus prayed might become a reality among His people, even if my comments about his application of Titus 3:10 seem rather blunt at times.

[3] Thomas B. Warren, "We Must Honor God's Law of Exclusion" (Editorial), *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 4 (July 1981): 22. Since the writing of this essay, Warren has crossed the great gulf to be with the Lord.

[4] For a detailed study of Romans 16:17, see Dallas Burdette, "Mark Them Which Cause Division" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 12 July 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading ROMANS.

[5] Webster's *II New Riverside University Dictionary*, 1984 ed., s. v. "heresy."

[6] Ibid., s.v. "heretic."

[7] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 210.

[8] Allen Bailey, "Beware of False Teachers," Preachers' *Study Notes: 1994 Preachers' Study* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian's Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82. As stated above concerning Thomas B. Warren, Bailey, too, is an individual that wishes to be true to the Word of God. Bailey received his interpretation of Titus 3:10 from two men—E.H. Miller (his grandfather) and his father (Alton Bailey). Both Alton and I received our understanding from E. H. Miller (my uncle and Bailey's father-in-law). The three of us—myself, Alton, and Allen—grew up in a fellowship in which grace was not discussed. It is significant that Allen calls attention to this neglect in his childhood and early ministry. Allen Bailey, to express in his own words this poverty of grace in preaching, says,

> Brothers, sisters, and friends, please listen. I do have some concerns and sympathy toward the confusion on this problem. By and large we have all been raised with law-law-law and little or no grace taught. I was raised in a congregation with three full length gospel

meetings every year. I don't remember preachers preaching the subject of grace. I worked closely with several congregations in Missouri, and though I attended their meetings for thirteen years, I cannot remember one lesson given on grace. I have been preaching for nineteen years and have just recently began (sic) to teach on Grace. We must remember that to preach grace is to preach Jesus Christ for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17) [Ibid., 78,79].

[9] Ibid., 75.

[10] Ibid., 77.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 78

[13] Ibid., 79.

[14] Ibid., 80.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 81

[20] E. P. Gould, "First Corinthians," in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, vol., 5 ed., Alvah Hovey, Reprint Edition , nd (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication, 1887), 97.

[21] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[22] Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 122, 123.

[23] *The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

[24] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

[25] William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 58, 59, 60.

[26] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 76.

[27] Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 5 (April 1965): 51.

[28] Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 2 (February 1965): 18.

[29] Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[30] This statement, no doubt, sends chills up-and-down the spines of many Christians. Yet, the founder of the movement known as the Churches of Christ was honest enough to refer to his movement as a denomination. Keep your mind on Campbell as he explains his movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a denomination**,** are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant [emphasis mine—RDB] (Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," ***Millennial Harbinger,*** New Series, 4, no. 12 (December 1840): 556.)

[31] Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

[32] This author recommends the following essays on this subject as two of the most informative articles written on this subject: Carl Ketcherside, "What Is Heresy," *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 39-44; Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33-39.

[33] Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33.

Humanity's Need: Christ the Savior of the World

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is God's answer to the problem of evil.**

Scripture Reading: **Acts 4:12**

As one reads the daily news and listens day after day to the current events on television with all its horrors, one wonders whether or not this twenty-first century is not the beginning of a new Dark Age. As one looks at the events that transpired in the last century (for example, two world wars), one is conscious that something is wrong with the world—something that is mysteriously and radically wrong. Humanity is faced with the fact of evil, the fact of guilt, and the fact of death. As one peruses the channels of history, one's faith is sadly shaken in the goodness of men and women. One witnesses the battling inconsistencies in humanity as one observes life as it fluctuates between good and evil. Just a brief fleeting glance at the annals of history confirms the depravity of men and women. In other words, life oscillates between heights and depths, between unselfish devotion to the ideal and ruthless egotism, between the desire to serve and between the lust for power, and between one's inherent desire to love and between one's self-assertion, which self-assertion works disorder in the world.

As the world turns farther and farther away from Christ, the world becomes less and less moral in its reaction toward other human beings. Just a casual reading of the newspapers and the viewing of the news on television reveal the utter disregard for human life and moral ethics in this world. If one wishes to focus upon the world at large, one observes evil in its full bloom. A laid-back glance at the world, one witnesses greed, lust, murder, hate, drunkenness, homosexuality, marital infidelity, and so on. In all these sins, one views the age-long predicament of modern humanity—moral beings who are sinners. What is the answer to the sin problem of lost humanity? The solution is found in no one else except Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. It is in this vein that Peter addresses the religious leaders concerning their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no

other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**).[1] Only redemption offered by Christ can meet the sins of the human race.

This world is full of sin and suffering, but sin and sufferings are not the only enemies of humanity. One enemy still stands out with devastating results—death. In spite of the definiteness of death, many, so it seems, act as if death is not a reality, at least not for themselves. In other words, numerous individuals act as if they are not made to die. The author of Hebrews calls attention to the reality of death and judgment: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (**Hebrews 9:26**). If one wishes to gain victory over death, this triumph can only be found in Jesus Christ. Paul addresses this issue of death this way: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (**1 Corinthians 15:54**). Paul continues his thoughts by saying, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**15:57**).

The answer to the world's problems, as stated by Paul, is found in Jesus. Yet, the world, as a whole, looks upon Jesus of Nazareth as a strange man upon the Cross. Nevertheless, countless thousands have found and still find the amazing wonder of God's forgiveness, and, at the same time, find divine victory over pain, over sin, and over death. One can hardly focus upon God's act of deliverance without a realization that this rescue from damnation comes from beyond history. Even though salvation comes from outside of history, nevertheless, one beholds salvation given to sinful humanity in terms of history. In this frame of mind, John writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**).

As one reflects upon **John 1:14**, one is immediately conscious that God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world, that is to say, "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (**3:16-17**). John begins his Gospel with eternity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (**1:1-3**). One is never complete without one's heart set upon eternity. Life, in and of itself, can never satisfy the inner longings of men and women since there is in everyone a consciousness of the eternal. Life on this planet points beyond itself. One knows institutively that there is life beyond this life. It is in this vein that Solomon, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned these words: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (**Ecclesiastes 3:11**).

Even though men and women have a built in system of eternity, yet, while Christians are upon planet earth, they must fight a spiritual battle to make this world a better place for future generations (**Matthew 5:13-16**; **Philippians 2:12-18**). The Christian's hope is still set on God and the time beyond death and the fashions of this world. It is this same regard that Jesus says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (**Matthew 6:33**). Also, Paul, in writing to the Christians at Colossae, expresses the need to look beyond this

life in one's spiritual earthly sojourn: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. [3] For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (**Colossians 3:1-3**).

Christians are members of the Kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom spoken of by Daniel the prophet (**Daniel 2**). Within this kingdom, Christians still work toward and pray for God's will to be performed on earth. In fact, Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, [10] your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:9-10**). Christians are to work toward this end—"Your will be done on earth." It is because of one's belief in eternal life beyond the grave that makes life meaningful in spite of the sufferings experienced here in this earthly life. This consciousness brings one face to face with the meaning of "believe." What does it mean to you to say that you believe in Jesus? Hopefully, it means committing yourself to the Christ and all that implies. Yes, it is belief in eternal life beyond the grave that gives meaning—real meaning—to this life. The need of men and women on planet earth is none other than Christ the Savior of the world.

Once more, with just a casual glance at the world of humanity, one's faith in civilization is sadly shaken. The war in Iraq with its radical Islamic extremists is a classic example of the breakdown and disillusionment of the modern world with all its intellectual and moral chaos, a world without the God of the Bible. Even though this world is a world of intellectual and scientific advancement, nevertheless, one witnesses that even this world of modern times is the repeat, as it were, of the dark ages in which chaos reigned between the 5th and 15th centuries AD. As stated above, the human race is faced with the fact of evil, the fact of guilt, and the fact of death. The only answer to the modern day dilemma can only be found in the Gospel of God, which is Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. The Gospel is the Good News of deliverance from evil, guilt, and death. It is not education that will transform the world into the kingdom of God, but rather the transforming message of the Gospel of Peace. Paul expresses the force of this statement to the Corinthians: "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (**1 Corinthians 1:21**). This message is foolishness to the world of unbelief. As one stands, as it were, before the Cross of Jesus, one cannot condone the sins of humanity. Man's inhumanity to man can only be eliminated through Jesus. The message of salvation through Jesus is the only hope for humanity.

The sins of every individual have an indelible quality. One cannot explain sin away or ignore or forget it. The newspapers and television are constant reminders of sin in all of its horrors. Many individuals live as if God does not exist. In other words, their lives move on a plane that is remote from God. Unfortunately, countless people live their lives without reflecting upon the presence of God and live their lives alone as if they themselves are the sole masters of their own lives. What is sin? One can state categorically that sin is life without God. Without Jesus, one is under the condemnation of God, that is to say, the wrath of God. God's remedy for sin is none other than Jesus' death upon the Cross. The death of Jesus is not a catastrophe, but rather the victory of God over the dominion of sin. Today, believers are incorporated into the Body of Jesus through faith and the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. For almost two thousand years, Christians have celebrated the Lord's Supper, as it is

generally called, in order to share, as it were, in the atonement produced by the death of Jesus. In the observance of the eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine, the Gospel is presented as a message concerning the gift of eternal life.

In Jesus, one is able to escape separation from God—guilt is removed. If one looses God, one looses oneself. The one thing that stands out in Christianity that is not found in religions outside of Christianity is that God became a man and came to planet earth to redeem lost humanity. For instance, the gods of India never died for the sins of humankind nor did they give their lives as a ransom for many. At the very heart of the Bible stands the idea of guilt as separation from God. Attention is called once more to the statement that there is nothing in any religion outside of Christianity that sets forth the belief of a man who came from eternity to earth to reconcile individuals to God through His own personal sacrifice of His life so that those who are separated from God by guilt and sin can be reconciled. At the very heart of Holy Scripture is the idea of the guilt of sin separating one from God. This One who came from eternity into time is the One that Paul writes about as he seeks to encourage the Corinthians to remember his message of salvation: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**I Corinthians 2:2**).

Humanity wants every kind of redemption from evil except the evil that strikes at the very heart of every person—the guilt of sin that burdens. The guilt of sin means that all is not well. What is the answer? Humanity's need is Christ the Savior of the world. The spiritual health of every human being is dependent upon a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Paul addresses God's response to the sin problem:

> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all,
> and therefore all died. [15] And he died for all that those who live should no
> longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised
> again. [16] So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.
> Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. [17]
> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the
> new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through
> Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling
> the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he
> has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore
> Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.
> We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him
> who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the
> righteousness of God. (**2 Corinthians 5:14-21**)

Isaiah (739 BC), too, dealt with the consequence of sin in all its ugliness—separation from God. To deal with this estrangement from God, God Himself devised the means of reconciliation through Jesus. Isaiah writes: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (**Isaiah 53:5**). This prophecy finds its fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ. It is in Him and through Him that God breaks down the barrier of guilt. Peace and reconciliation with God is accomplished for those who put their trust in Him as the Atoner for their guilt. One can

hear the words of God echoing, as it were, in the hearts of those who respond to Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**). **Isaiah 53** is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in Him and through Him alone that the atoning event of redemption took place. In spite of the Jews rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, nevertheless, the Cross is still the crown and the climax of His whole atoning work of reconciliation. This atoning work took place through Him alone, not through Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed, or any other so-called gods or men. It is in this vein that Jesus states emphatically that He and He alone is God's Way of salvation: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**).

Guilt is the fate of humanity. Paul writes: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). One cannot explain sin away; one cannot ignore it or forget it. In the words of Paul, one can only cry out: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death (**7:24**)? Immediately following Paul's penetrating question, he gives the answer: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (**7:25**)! John also writes with sensitive insight about one's hope, in spite of one's own feelings of inadequacy in his or her struggles to live the Christian life: "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence [20] whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (**1 John 3:19-20**). For Paul, death is an inevitable fact. All humanity faces the certain and ruthless and final fact of death—no one can escape. Death still paints a picture of guilt and evil. On the surface, hope seems to be doomed for humanity. Yet, in spite of seemingly hopelessness for humanity, God provides forgiveness and reconciliation in spite of all the seemingly hopelessness of the past that appears to be beyond repair.

Physical death still strikes terror in the hearts of men and women. Death reminds everyone of the brevity of his or her earthly life. Everyone fades as a leaf. In spite of the stark reality of death, many individuals still live as if they are not made to die. Yet, death is certain. Remember, as stated above, the author of Hebrews expresses the certainty of death this way: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (**Hebrews 9:27**). Humanity's victory over death is Jesus Christ. In Him and Him alone is death swallowed up in victory. God's answer to humanity's need is found in the story of redemption (the Gospel). The story of redemption is about God moving in this world through a human life, namely, Jesus. It is through his birth, death, and resurrection that God accomplished victory over the grave. The story of Christ is the story of power from beyond this world of time. It is in time that one witnesses God moving and acting in order to bring about reconciliation of lost humanity. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, one beholds one of the mightiest activities of God in the universe—forgiveness of sins through the giving of His One and only Son. In this act, God brings the power of the eternal world into this world of sin and death. God brings together eternity and time.

CONCLUSION

In the Cross of Jesus, one is painfully aware of the horror of sin in all of its heinousness and filth and utter degradation. On the other hand, one is also conscious of the revelation of God's redeeming love in all of its beauty and compassion and mercy.

Who can deliver one from evil, guilt, and death? The answer is found in Jesus who is able to liberate one from condemnation. Salvation can only come from outside oneself; it must come from the other side of reality—God who is eternal. In salvation, one observes the Trinity at work. Jesus who is not of history was nevertheless in history. In Him, one sees the unique act of God—an act to accomplish humanity's need of salvation. This is what the Incarnation is all about. John writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**). The Incarnation is the very heart and pulse beat of one's faith.

As one reflects upon humanity's need, one should remember that the center of the world is God, not humanity. God's claim upon humanity is founded in the very nature of God Himself. Even though individuals may reject God's claim upon themselves, they cannot escape it. Sin has divided and alienated and split up humanity. Yet, men and women are not without hope. Men and women can find their wholeness in God through Jesus the Savior of the world. The advent of Christ into this sinful world of humanity makes a new beginning—God's new beginning. In Jesus, God is still at work with the wrongness of humanity. This wrongness of human life is dealt with in the human life of the infinite God. In Jesus, one witnesses God breaking into human history. The Christian faith does justice to the world of sin and shame. On the other hand, world religions do not. A classic example, as stated earlier, surrounds the radicals of the Islam religion. On the other hand, Christianity does justice to the world of men and women. God is still acting and has acted in the midst of a world having gone wrong through its rejection of the One who is called the "Prince of Peace." It is in Christianity that every person has significance. God is in action in Jesus Christ. In conclusion, listen to the words of Isaiah and of Paul:

> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,[b] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (**Isaiah 9:6-7**)
>
> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**)

[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[d] Or *the Only Begotten*
[a] Or *be a sin offering*
[d] Or *the Only Begotten*

b Or *Wonderful, Counselor*

a Or *be a sin offering*

Pentecost:

The Birth of the Church

Thrust Statement: **God wants His people to exhibit passion for the souls of men and women.**

Scripture Reading: **Acts 2:1-47**

PENTECOST:
BEGINNING OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT MOVEMENT

The story of Pentecost, as revealed in **Acts 2**, begins a movement that neither the powers of Rome nor the religious leaders of Israel could stop. This movement began with the conversion of approximately 3000 to Jesus of Nazareth. Following the Day of Pentecost, one observes the apostles and other Christians going forth with passion for lost souls, with power to preach the Gospel, and with purpose to reach people for Christ. These disciples had one thing in mind—the preaching of Jesus as the savior of the world. Today, Christians are to manifest this same passion for the unconverted, the same determination to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the same purpose of making disciples for Jesus.

The story of Pentecost invokes the story of the Holy Spirit breathing a new community into life. One recalls how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit put, as it were, a fire into the hearts of the disciples of Jesus. This story of God's power on this particular day should still motivate every person to respond with great joy as he or she reflects upon God's regenerating power on that festival day. It was now fifty days since the Passover, and the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Weeks or the Festival of Weeks (**Deuteronomy 16:10**). This day was also called the Day of Firstfruits (**Numbers 28:26**). It was a festival of thanks for the harvest, which began immediately after the Passover (**Deuteronomy 16:9**). This culmination of the festival of thanks for the harvest is the day in which God added to His new community about 3000 souls.

Prior to the day of Pentecost, Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the gift His Father had promised (**Acts 1:4**). So the disciples waited in Jerusalem for this gift of the Holy Spirit, which was poured out upon them (**2:1-4**). This act initiated the witnessing of the events that had transpired over a three-year period in which Jesus had conducted His ministry. Surely this event must have triggered in their minds the words Jesus had spoken ten days earlier: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (**1:8**).[1] Also, one cannot reflect upon this statement from the Lord Jesus without reflection upon His statement about the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (**Matthew 28:19-20**).

The Feast of Harvest:
God's Timing for the New Covenant Movement

God's timing for the proclamation of His way of salvation through Jesus is geared to reach out to a large number of individuals at one time. This Feast of Harvest celebration is appropriate. People came from various parts of the Roman Empire—Europe, Asia, and Africa (**Acts 2:5-12**). Luke captures this event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles with glowing words:

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them (**2:1-4**).

Following this speaking in other languages—representative of seventeen nations present—Peter began to tell the multitude about this One who had been crucified less than two months earlier: "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (**2:22**). Not only did Peter call attention to the miraculous in Jesus' ministry, but also, in this same speech, he calls attention to their guilt and God's reaction: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (**2:36**). How did many of the individuals who witnessed this event and this preaching respond? Listen to Luke as he reports the outcome of this bold proclamation of God's Way of Salvation through Jesus Christ:

> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**2:37-38**).

Three Thousand Responded to God's Grace

Upon hearing these words, Luke informs Theophilus that 3000 repented and were baptized: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**2:41**). Yes, **Acts 2** is the story about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. Even though many of the events that transpired on this Day of Pentecost cannot be repeated, nevertheless Christians today can duplicate other things that permeated this body of believers—passion for the souls of men and women, motivation to tell the message of redemption, and an insatiable purpose in life to win people to Christ.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW COVENANT MOVEMENT

Passion for the Salvation of Souls

One cannot read the **Book of Acts** without a consciousness of a deep passion for the souls of men and women. Following the Day of Pentecost, one finds the disciples sharing the good news about God's way of salvation on a daily basis: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (**2:46-47**). They were on fire for the Lord. They participated in public gatherings in the temple courts and in private gatherings in their homes. On one occasion, Peter went to the temple during the hour of prayer—at three in the afternoon—and, while there, he encountered a crippled beggar (over forty years old) whom he healed (**3:1-10**). This opened the door once more for him to witness concerning Jesus and talk about faith in the name of Jesus (**3:11-26**).

One catches a glimpse of the passion that Peter exhibited for the salvation of men and women. This miraculous healing opened the floodgates, as it were, for him and John to witness for Christ before the Sanhedrin (**4:1-22**). Again, Luke details for Theophilus the intensity with which they preached Jesus:

> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. [42] Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (**5:41-42**).

Numbers Increased to Five Thousand Men

Because of the passion for preaching Jesus, Luke reveals how the number of disciples (only men in this count) grew to five thousand within a short span of time (**4:4**). Philip preached to people in Samaria and many responded to "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" by believing the preaching of Philip (**8:12**). The numbers of conversions are too numerous to analyze in this message, but the missionary journeys of Paul reveals the passion that he had in preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified.

GOD CAME TO SAVE SINNERS

Story by Tony Campolo

Do you have an intense yearning for the souls of men and women who do not know God? Are you only concerned about the so-called respectable? How do you feel about drug addicts? How do you feel about prostitutes? How do you feel about alcoholics? The following story is told by Tony Campolo, professor of sociology at Eastern College, which illustrates the concern for the lost, even prostitutes. He tells the story of his visit to Honolulu for a Christian conference. Early in the morning, he ventured out of his hotel to find a coffee shop. He found a tiny coffee shop and walked in and sat down. The following is his description of the events:

> The heavyset guy in a greasy apron behind the counter came over and asked me, "What do you want?" I told him I wanted a cup of coffee and a donut. As I sat there munching on my donut and sipping my coffee at 3:30 in the morning, the door suddenly opened, swung wide and to my discomfort in marched 8 or 9 provocative and rather boisterous prostitutes. It was a small place and they sat on either side of me. Their talk was garrulous, loud and crude. I felt completely out of place. I was just about to make my getaway when I heard the woman sitting next to me say, "You know, tomorrow is my birthday. I'm going to be 39." Her friend responded in a rather nasty tone, "So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Do you want me to get a cake, and sing happy birthday to you?"
>
> "Come on," the women sitting next to me said, "why do you have to be so mean? I'm just telling you that's all. Why do you have to put me down? I was just telling you that it is my birthday. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should I have a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"
>
> Tony Campolo said, "When I heard that, I made a decision. I sat and waited until the woman left and then I called over to the counter to the heavyset guy and asked him, 'Do they come in here every night?'" "Yeah," he answered. "The one right next to me", I asked, "does she come in here every night?" "Yeah," he said, "that's Agnes. Yeah, she comes in here every night. Why do you want to know?" "Because," I replied, "I heard her say that tomorrow is her birthday. What do you say we do something special for her? What do you think about throwing a birthday party for her, right here in the diner?"
>
> A cute kind of smile crept over that heavyset man's chubby cheeks. He answered, "That's a great idea. I like it. That's great. Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind. I don't think anybody has ever done anything nice and kind for her." "Well, look" I told him, "if it is OK with you, I'll be back here tomorrow morning at 2:30. I'll decorate the place. I'll even get a birthday cake for her." "No way," he said, "the birthday cake, that's my thing. I'll bake the birthday cake. "Two-thirty the next morning, Campolo says, I was back at that diner. I picked up some crepe paper and other decorations at the store, and made a sign of big pieces of cardboard that read, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" I decorated that diner from one end to the other. I had that diner really looking great. The word must have gotten out on the street because by 3:15 that next morning every prostitute in Honolulu was in that place. There was wall-to-wall prostitutes—and me.

At 3:30 on the dot the door of the diner swung open and in came Agnes and her friend. I had everybody ready; after all, I was sort of the informal master of ceremonies of this whole affair. It was my idea, so when they came in we all jumped up and screamed and we sang, “Happy birthday, Agnes!” And you know, I've never seen a person so flabbergasted, so stunned, so shaken. Her mouth fell open, her knees started to buckle, her friend had to offer her arm to steady her, and I noticed she had started to cry.

When the birthday cake with all the candles was carried out, that’s when she just lost it. She started sobbing. Harry, in his gruff voice mumbled, “Blow out the candles, Agnes, blow out the candles.” Then he handed her a knife, and he ordered, “Cut the cake, Agnes, cut the cake.” Agnes looked down at that cake, and then without taking her eyes off it, she slowly and softly said, “Look, Harry, is it all right with you if I, I mean, if I don’t, what I want to ask, is it OK if I keep the cake a little while? Is it all right if we don’t eat it right away?” Harry shrugged and answered, “Sure, Agnes, that’s fine, you want to keep the cake, keep the cake, take it home if you want.” “Oh, could I?” she asked. Agnes looked at Tony, “I live just down the street a couple doors; I want to take the cake home, is that OK? I'll be right back, honest.” She got off her stool, she picked up that cake, and she carried it out of that diner like it was the Holy Grail. She walked slowly toward the door, and we all stood there just speechless. When the door closed behind her, there was stunned silence in the place.

Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, “What do you say we pray together?” Looking back on it now, it seems more than a little strange that a sociologist from eastern PA would be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. But I prayed. I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed, and that God would be good to her. And when I finished, Harry leaned over, and with a trace of hostility in his voice he said, “Hey, you never told me you were a preacher. What kind of preacher are you anyway? What church do you belong to?” In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered him quietly, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry thought a moment, and then almost sneered as he answered, “No you don’t; there is no church like that. Because if there was one, I’d join it.”[2]

As one reflects upon this story, one should ask himself/herself: What is it that would entice a man to throw a birthday party for a prostitute? One cannot help but wonder if it is not a desire for the Day of Pentecost to stay alive and for others to repent and to be baptized and to receive the Holy Spirit and to be transformed by the power of God’s Spirit into a fighting force for the cause of Christ. Is not this kind of behavior the kind of behavior manifested by Jesus in His dealings with sinful humanity? Following the healing of a paralytic (**Matthew 9:1-8**), Matthew gives an account of Jesus reaction to the Pharisees’ condemnation of Jesus because He ate with “tax collectors and sinners”:

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. [10] While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. [11] When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" [12] On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. [13] But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (**9:9-13**).

Power to Reach People for Christ

Just as the Holy Spirit enveloped the apostle on the day of Pentecost, so also, every person who responds to God's grace receives the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**). Even though Christians today do not receive the unique outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the same sense that one witnesses on the Day of Pentecost, nevertheless, every Christian still receives the Holy Spirit as God's gift in order to affirm one's gift of eternal life. With this assurance of salvation, one can go, as it were, in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming God's way of salvation by grace through faith.

The church still needs individuals with a passion for the lost. How do you relate to the down-an-out losers of humanity? Are you concerned about their salvation? Are you burdened over the souls of lost men and women? Not only does the church need individuals with passion, but the church also needs individuals with motivation to reach out to those who do not know Jesus as the answer to the sin problem each person faces. As one analyzes the early Christian converts, one readily observes compulsion in their desire to reach out to the lost. One detects that there was power, compulsion, and motivation in their lives as they reached out to sinners to tell them about God's grace.

Is there the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? Is there compulsion in your life for the salvation of souls? Is there motivation in your life to reach out to sinners? As stated above, shortly after Pentecost, one reads that the "number of men grew to about five thousand" (**4:4**). There may well have been over ten thousand converts to Christianity by this time—men and women. Surely, this number of conversions represents the power behind the early church. How can you experience the power of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps, one today can experience the power of the Holy Spirit through association with other believers. Have you ever experienced the reality of Christ? Again, one can experience this reality of Christ by association with other believers.

Christians Do Not Live in Isolationism

Dwight L. Moody

One sure way for one not to experience the power of the Holy Spirit is to live in isolation from other believers. Surely there is truth in this statement: "There is no salvation outside the church." Again, one could say, "There is no Christianity without

communion." Once more, "There is no love without family." Dwight L. Moody once called on a leading citizen in Chicago to persuade him to accept Christ. After they were seated, he talked to him about the need to meet with the people of God on Sunday. But the man objected. He told Moody that he could be just as good a Christian outside the church as well as in it. Whereupon, Moody got up and walked over to the fireplace, without saying anything, and picked up the tongs and reached into the fireplace and picked up a blazing coal from the fire and set it off by itself. In silence the two men watched it smolder and eventually go out. The man looked at Moody and said, "I see."

The early church did not seek God's will in isolation from other believers. They were told not to abandon the assembling of themselves together (**Hebrews 10:25**). The church is the continuation of the Messianic ministry. There is no such thing as isolationism within the Christian community. Again, the early church did not seek God's will in seclusion. The Christian community is the company of the committed. It is a company of the redeemed. One cannot understand the idea of "a company" apart from involvement. Christ established His church as a revolutionary company in order to reach out to the world. Christ formed the church in order for it to become a fellowship of witnesses concerning Himself. When one is converted to Christ, this conversion, in and of itself, necessitates one's witnessing about the One whom God made both Lord and Christ.

Nature of the Church—Not A Building

As one wonders about the nature of the church, one should remember that the church is not a building. The church is people. The church building should be designed as a drill hall for the Christian task force. In other words, the church building should be a launching pad from which Christians are propelled out into the world to witness. The church is the fellowship of the committed. Do you have a mission? If not, then why not try winning your neighbor next door to Christ. The church needs to recapture the Christian banner of motivation to share with the world the message of redemption. The church today, as in the first century, can be a power for God.

The Church Must Have a Purpose

What does it mean to you to say that the church must have a purpose? In order for you to fulfill your function in God's community, you must understand that the goal of the church is to win people to Jesus Christ. Christians are partners with God in this wonderful scheme of redemption. It is in this regard that Paul writes:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 5:19—6:1**).

Are you going out into the streets with the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit? Are you going out into the world with the purpose of winning people to Christ? Do you remember your basic identity? You must! Every Christian must fulfill his or her basic purpose in life—lead souls to Jesus. Does a church that throws a birthday party for a prostitute at 3:30 in the morning impassion you? If not, why not?

CONCLUSION

Even though Christians cannot replicate the exact events that transpired on the Day of Pentecost, they can still capture the spirit and zeal that permeated the new community of God on earth. Christians can still exhibit a passion for the souls of men and women. Christians can still display power as a collective body of individuals in reaching out to the lost. Christians can still remember the purpose of their mission—wining souls to Jesus. Christians can still keep in mind their identity—children of God. What does the following words of Jesus mean to you: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (**Matthew 9:11**). Yes, Christians are to be "salt" and "light" in the world of corruption and darkness. Christians are to tell the lost about Jesus of Nazareth, the savior of the world.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] I am indebted to Brett Blair, "Episode II: Birth of the Church," for this story (cited verbatim). See "Episode II: birth of the Church" [ONLINE]. Available from www.eSermons.com [accessed 17 May 2002, located under ESERMONS. To access the sermons on this website, one has to pay an annual fee of 49.95 (Level I).

Salvation is Found in No One Else

Thrust Statement: **God revealed Himself in Christ.**

Scripture Reading: **Acts 4:8-12**

"Salvation is found in no one else," writes Peter. Is there another way to God other than through Jesus Christ? Is it the summit of intolerance for one to say that salvation is found in no other name than the name of Jesus? What about the religions of the world? Why the name of Jesus alone? What about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Animism, Judaism, Secularism, and so on?[1] Is Jesus really the only way to God? For the mindset of many, the words of Peter border on the verge of narrow-mindedness and fanaticism. Some world religions have veneration for Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, they deny the words of Peter: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**).[2]

With this truth about Jesus, Peter would not budge. His statement does not allow for other alternatives. Familiarity with these penetrating words of Peter has dulled the minds of many to the startling and revolutionary quality of such a statement. This world-shattering statement of Peter should open the minds and hearts of Christians to the message of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The Church must not compromise this truth. The Church has been chosen by God as the vehicle of His revelation of salvation in and through the Incarnate Son. The Cross cannot be taken out of Christianity without changing it beyond recognition.

Even though Christians cannot compromise the statement of Peter, nevertheless, believers must not become narrow and bigoted and manifest a harsh and unlovely attitude toward those who do not understand. Christians cannot and should not be intolerant toward the ungodly nor toward the godly. In the Christian community, Christians are often intolerant toward anyone who dares to reject their traditions. Today, it is excommunication, not the stake. The word *intolerance* sends chills up-and-down the spine. Just what meaning should one attach to the word *intolerance* in dealing with world religions or even doctrinal differences within the Christian

community? The word *tolerance* may carry two basic connotations. It goes almost without saying that one concept of tolerance is that Christians cannot punish or persecute those who disagree with their understanding of God or Christianity. There is a sense in which the word *patience* is equivalent to the word *tolerance*. Christians are to be tolerant toward other people. In the religious world of Christianity, especially in earlier times, the State as well as the Church refused tolerance toward those who refused to submit themselves in religious matters to the State or the established Church. Christians do not have the right to punish or persecute one who professes a different theology from his or her brand of orthodoxy.

Just a perusal of Church history reveals that many Christians were convicted as heretics and burnt at the stake and simply wiped out for different religious convictions. Jesus was not the issue, but rather the doctrinal teachings of a select few became the focus of orthodoxy.[3] During the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists were pursued with a vengeance that would shock even the most hardened Christian today, at least I hope so. On November 13, 1544, Maria and Ursula van Beckum were burned at the stake for their Anabaptist faith.[4] This persecution was not over the nature of God, the reality of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, or the authority of the Scriptures, but rather upon their insistence upon rebaptism of those baptized in infancy. Felix Manz was the first to be executed at the hands of the Zurich authorities in Switzerland. What was his crime? He became associated with the Anabaptist and insisted on adult baptism.[5] Within the Reformation movement, rebaptism was one of the most revolutionary acts of the Reformation movement.

Michael Sattler (1490-1527) execution was one of the most notorious executions in the sixteenth century. After his arrest, his trial lasted for two days and then he was burned alive. Why was he burned alive? He did not believe that the actual body and blood of Christ were present in the Lord's Supper. He placed the bread and wine on a plate and ate and drank the same. He also married a wife. William R. Estep recounts the story of his martyrdom in the following account:

> These events took place over a two-day period. Sattler was sentenced on May 18 and executed two days later. The torture, a prelude to the execution, began at the marketplace, where a piece was cut from Sattler's tongue. Pieces of flesh were torn from his body twice with redhot tongs. He was then tied to a cart. On the way to the scene of the execution he was torn with the tongs five more times. In the market place and at the site of the execution, still able to speak, the unshakable Sattler prayed for his persecutors. After being bound to a ladder with ropes and pushed into the fire, he admonished the people, the judges, and the mayor to repent and be converted. Then he prayed, "Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the way and the truth: because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with thy help to this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood." When the ropes on his wrists had burned, Sattler raised both forefingers, giving the promised signal to his fellow Anabaptist that a martyr's death was bearable. Then the assembled crowed heard coming from his seared lips, "Father, I commend my spirit into Thy hands."[6]

Following his execution, three more were executed. Eight days later, his wife was drowned in the Neckar when she refused to recant. She turned down an offer of amnesty and a comfortable home.[7] Hubmaier (1480-1528), another Anabaptist, was burned at the stake in Vienna on March 10, 1528. As they rubbed sulphur and gunpowder into his beard, he cried out: "O dear brothers, pray God that he will give me patience in this my suffering. I will die in the Christian faith." As his head and hair caught fire, he again cried out: "O Jesus, Jesus."[8] Three days later his wife was drowned in the Danube.

This kind of intolerance prevailed for centuries within the Christian community. Yet today, this kind of ill treatment is forbidden by many countries of the modern state along with the insistence on freedom of religion and conscience. Many states will no longer allow the Church to use them as an instruments of violent intolerance. The State will no longer permit factions of the various denominations to persecute people on religious grounds, even though Churches still practice a hounding of a different nature. Christians have a lot to be thankful for in today's society. The State will not consent to blind fury and religious persecution. For one to use violent behavior in support of right belief is in sharp contrast to the teachings of Jesus. Forbearance must become a part of one's behavior toward others of a different mindset.

This kind of sadistic fanaticism of persecution, as mentioned above, is not in harmony with the teachings of Jesus. On the other hand, one cannot accept the philosophy of the world religions that Jesus is to be placed alongside of Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. Christians cannot, and must not, place these gods in parallel to Jesus as the Savior of humanity, or the world. Even though one exercises patience with individuals of different perspectives about reality, nevertheless, one cannot accept other beliefs as true. Christians must affirm the dictum of Peter: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**).

Why is this (salvation in no other name) the position of Christians? If Peter's statement is true, one cannot compromise this truth. Truth can never be negotiated. Truth is either true or it is not. From one point of view, one can say that truth excludes the possibility of something else being true. If Peter's statement is true, one cannot compromise with beliefs that contradict this truth. For one to assert Peter's statement as true, this admission excludes the possibility of its opposite being true. For example, if two plus two equals four, then two plus two cannot be five. Or for example, if Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC on March 15, then it is false to say that he died a natural death in 45 BC. Both cannot be true. Again, if there is only one God, then there cannot be more than one. As one reflects upon truth, one is conscious that truth is always single and exclusive.

This study is not a study of the various religions of the world, but one thing is observable in Christianity that is not found in any other religion—a man who came to earth to reconcile God by the sacrifice of His life for those who had become separated from God by their sins. The Cross of Jesus is the Divine act of reconciliation. "He bore the sin of many" is that alone which distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. The Gospel of God is just this—Jesus gave His life in order to restore the

alienation between humanity and God. Jesus, in response to the mother of Zebedee's sons, said: Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:28**). If you study Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and so on, you will never find this truth: One who died on the Cross for the atonement of mankind and who gave His life a ransom for many. Neither Buddha nor Rama nor Krishna nor Mohammad died for the sins of the world.

Paul understood this truth about the self-sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross. In fact, he tells the Corinthians: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:2**). It is the Cross of Jesus that differentiates "special" revelation from all other forms of religion. At the very center of the Bible, one observes the idea of sin separating humanity from God. But in Jesus, this blockage has been removed. No one can escape the root of sin in his or her life. The reason for this fact is that everyone is guilty in the presence of God. The evil that cuts through to one's heart is the evil of one's own being—"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**).

In sin, one loses not only God, but also one loses himself or herself in the process—"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (**Ephesians 2:12**), writes Paul. Both men and women have always longed for redemption from sin that strikes the very heart of one's soul—from the guilt of sin that burdens them. Sin is something that affects oneself. It attacks the very core of one's being, that is to say, his relationship with God. Everyone is conscious that sin means that all is not well between one and God. One's spiritual health is dependent upon one's relationship with God. This relationship can only be restored in the One who said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**).

In Jesus, the guilt of sin separating both men and women from God is removed. It is in this vein that Paul writes: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (**Ephesians 2:13**). Isaiah explains the separation from God this way: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (**Isaiah 59:2**). Why Jesus in the scheme of redemption from sin? Paul sets forth the case for Christ in Romans:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

This declaration by Paul is the very reason that Peter explains: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). Again, Paul unfolds the wisdom of God in sending Jesus for the salvation of the human race: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). It is only in and through Jesus that one can stand before a Holy God. Why? God made Jesus our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption. Again, Paul captures God's part and Christ's part in the salvation of men and women:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

CONCLUSION

The Bible reveals God's act of redemption in and through Jesus. Only God Himself can remove sin; no man or woman can do so. God reaches out to both men and women in their fallen state and offers forgiveness in and through the atonement of His Son Jesus. It is only in Jesus that one can be restored to fellowship with God. Herein lies the very essence of true healing and true salvation in that He sent Jesus to make atonement for the sins that separates one from God. As one recalls the Gospel of God, one is reminded that God's love takes hold of one in Christ. The Gospel is about God's love. Many do not seem to be able to accept the radical message of free grace in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness and justification of the sinner can only be found in the suffering savior. It is just that which was achieved through Jesus Christ and His atoning death upon the Cross. Isaiah (739 BC) expresses it this way: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (**Isaiah 53:5**).

In Jesus Christ the Crucified, one finds an exact fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. It is in Him and through Him that God has broken down the barrier created by our guilt of sin. The Cross is the sign of the Christian faith. It is the sign of the Christian church. It is the sign of God's special revelation in Jesus Christ. God has linked humanity to Himself in peace and reconciliation through belief in the One who atones for the sins of the world. The atoning took place in Him and through Him alone, no one else. This is why Peter exclaims: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**).

The blind fanaticism of the Jews resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus, nevertheless, this crucifixion of Jesus became the climax and the crown of His whole atoning work. In the words of Jesus upon the Cross to the Father: "It is finished" (**John**

19:30). The atonement did not take place through Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Mohammed, but only through Christ. The Cross reveals God's love for lost humanity. In Jesus one is confronted with the radical message of free grace. Forgiveness and justification can only be found in the suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53**. This grace that one receives in Christ Jesus undeservedly cannot be intolerant or arrogant, but loving. Christians are not to go forth as rulers or dictators, but as servants of the Most High God. Love as grounded in Jesus is the only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance. Do you stand in awe of what God accomplished in and through Jesus—salvation by grace through faith in Him? If not, the end of awe or reverence is the end of true religion.

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[1] This study is not designed to explore the various religions of the world, but rather, to accentuate the truth that Jesus is the only way to God the Father. If one wishes to study the various religions of the world, the following books should help: (1) Johannes G. Vos, *A Christian Introduction to Religions of the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965); Dean C. Halverson, General Editor (*The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1996); and Earl Schipper, *Religions of the world* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982).

[2]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless otherwise stated.

[3] Even today, one observes the same kind of mindset as to what Christianity is all about. Jesus is not the focus of one's preaching; grace is not the focus of one's preaching. The Cross of Christ is not the focus of one's preaching, but rather the voicing of past traditions handed down from generation to generation as if this is what Christianity is all about. A great deal of so-called preaching today, especially within the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement known by various names—Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ. Within this movement, churches are divided over a host of issues, which they consider essential for salvation. Most of the divisions center around what is commonly referred to as a worship service performed on Sunday morning with five prescribed rituals performed in a prescribed manner—something which the Bible never addresses.

[4] William R. Estep, *Renaissance Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1986), 205.

[5] See Ibid., 177-194 for a detailed study of the persecutions of the major contributors toward reform within the established church.

[6] Ibid., 203.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 216.

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

a Or *be a sin offering*

Index of Scripture References

Page numbers refer to the essay pagination (Arabic numerals) in this volume.

Genesis 3:15 144, 233, 310
Genesis 12:1-3 310
Genesis 12:4 317
Genesis 17:1-8 207
Genesis 17:1-9 186
Genesis 17:17 143
Genesis 21:5 316
Genesis 37:9 325
Genesis 47:9 316
Genesis 49 309
Genesis 49:1 299, 309
Genesis 49:1-10 298
Genesis 49:5 494
Genesis 49:10 309, 328
Genesis 50:26 317
Exodus 2:1 315
Exodus 5:2 108
Exodus 26:33 247
Leviticus 7:18 178, 382, 406
Leviticus 21:6 247
Leviticus 22:18 494
Leviticus 26:18 317
Numbers 28:26 511
Deuteronomy 6:4-9 107
Deuteronomy 6:16 151
Deuteronomy 10:12 388, 448
Deuteronomy 16:9 511
Deuteronomy 16:10 511
Deuteronomy 32 303, 313, 317, 321, 322
Deuteronomy 32:1 321, 322
Deuteronomy 32:21-22 303
2 Samuel 13:17 78
2 Samuel 19:19 178, 382, 406
2 Kings 18:19 52
1 Chronicles 28:12 477
1 Chronicles 28:19 477
2 Chronicles 18:16 59
Job 9:2 164, 368, 395, 484
Job 39:11 52
Psalm 1:1-2 252
Psalm 1:1-6 227, 267
Psalm 2:12 52
Psalm 19:9 388, 448
Psalm 24:7 324
Psalm 32:2 178, 382, 406
Psalm 35:19 174, 378
Psalm 40:8 227, 267
Psalm 40:8-10 226, 266
Psalm 40:10 227, 267
Psalm 46:6 338
Psalm 50:3 338
Psalm 78:21-22 339
Psalm 91:11 151
Psalm 91:11-12 151
Psalm 95:7 16
Psalm 95:7-11 16
Psalm 97:3-6 339
Psalm 102:25-27 314
Psalm 106 254
Psalm 150 91
Proverbs 1:7 388, 448
Proverbs 11:28 52
Proverbs 16:20 52
Proverbs 26:17 79
Proverbs 28:13 15
Ecclesiastes 3:11 505
Isaiah 1:1-2 302
Isaiah 1:2-3 322, 358
Isaiah 2:1-4 311
Isaiah 2:2 313
Isaiah 2:2-4 312, 313
Isaiah 2:9-11 312
Isaiah 2:19 312
Isaiah 2:21 312
Isaiah 7:14 186
Isaiah 9:6 169, 373, 400
Isaiah 9:6-7 509
Isaiah 11:1 186
Isaiah 13:9-13 300, 301, 327
Isaiah 13:10 314, 348, 349, 350, 351, 361
Isaiah 13:13 328
Isaiah 30:27-33 339
Isaiah 34:1-5 301
Isaiah 40:3-5 347
Isaiah 43:24 79
Isaiah 45:22 324
Isaiah 51:13 322
Isaiah 51:16 329
Isaiah 53 476, 478, 508, 524

Isaiah 53:5 166, 370, 397, 489, 507, 523
Isaiah 59:2 522
Isaiah 61:3 324
Isaiah 65 341
Isaiah 65:1 349
Isaiah 65:2-7 331
Isaiah 65:15-17 342
Isaiah 65:17 304, 330, 340, 341
Isaiah 65:17-18 341
Isaiah 66:22 330, 340, 342
Jeremiah 23:5-6 228
Jeremiah 23:6 166, 370, 393, 397, 489
Lamentations 2:3 340
Ezekiel 13:2 477
Ezekiel 43:7-9 59
Daniel 2 305, 356, 506
Daniel 2:28 359, 360
Daniel 2:40-44 291
Daniel 2:44 282, 323, 341, 356
Daniel 8 287
Daniel 9:27 275, 295, 316, 361
Daniel 12 313
Daniel 12:1 325
Daniel 12:1-3 456
Daniel 12:4 298, 300, 307, 356
Daniel 12:4-7 298, 305
Daniel 12:7 306, 311, 325, 328
Hosea 10:8 317
Joel 2 305
Joel 2:28 301
Joel 2:28-31 301
Joel 2:28-32 304, 307, 315
Amos 3:2 248
Habakkuk 3:17-18 241
Haggai 2:6 317, 328, 344, 349, 361
Haggai 2:7 328
Zechariah 3:1 323
Zechariah 3:8-10 324
Zechariah 7:11-12 478
Malachi 4 306
Malachi 4:1-6 305
Malachi 4:5 307, 326
Matthew 1:1-17 186
Matthew 1:12 186
Matthew 2 343
Matthew 2:6 61, 62
Matthew 2:23 185
Matthew 3 272, 306, 332
Matthew 3:1-12 326
Matthew 3:7 307, 358
Matthew 3:7-10 224
Matthew 3:7-12 141, 189, 272, 306, 353
Matthew 3:8 224, 265
Matthew 3:9 141
Matthew 3:15 233
Matthew 3:17 184, 508
Matthew 4:1-11 41, 254
Matthew 4:23 190
Matthew 5 147, 203, 466
Matthew 5:13 252
Matthew 5:13-16 225, 265, 505
Matthew 5:14-16 238
Matthew 5:15 252
Matthew 5:17-18 320
Matthew 5:17-20 302, 303
Matthew 5:18 303, 344, 345
Matthew 5:18-20 483
Matthew 5:32 122
Matthew 6:9-10 227, 267, 506
Matthew 6:11 50
Matthew 6:19-24 108
Matthew 6:24 222, 257
Matthew 6:24-25 442
Matthew 6:28-34 106
Matthew 6:33 257, 444, 505
Matthew 7:15 203, 204
Matthew 8:27 70, 71
Matthew 9 190
Matthew 9:1-8 435, 515
Matthew 9:11 518
Matthew 11:1 190
Matthew 11:10 307
Matthew 11:15 436
Matthew 11:28-30 258, 259
Matthew 12 197
Matthew 12:2 196
Matthew 12:9-10 196
Matthew 12:31 462
Matthew 12:36-37 196
Matthew 12:38 196
Matthew 12:41-42 196
Matthew 15:1-2 196
Matthew 16:16 12
Matthew 16:21 200, 203
Matthew 16:24 223, 264
Matthew 16:27-28 271, 274

Matthew 16:28 343
Matthew 18:20 107
Matthew 18:21-35 14
Matthew 20:17 201
Matthew 20:25-28 30, 34, 43, 57, 62, 63, 76
Matthew 20:28 442, 522
Matthew 21 321
Matthew 22:37 479
Matthew 22:37-40 149, 225, 235
Matthew 23 203
Matthew 23:1-12 44
Matthew 23:8-12 76
Matthew 23:14-34 320
Matthew 23:29-39 271
Matthew 24 12, 195, 197, 271, 272, 298, 301, 303, 304, 313, 316, 320, 323, 332, 333, 336, 356, 358, 359
Matthew 24:1-6 356
Matthew 24:3 300, 308, 358
Matthew 24:15-21 288
Matthew 24:21 325
Matthew 24:26-35 334
Matthew 24:29 301, 319, 328, 336
Matthew 24:29-35 322, 326, 347, 353
Matthew 24:30 274
Matthew 24:34 271, 331
Matthew 24:35 320, 325, 346
Matthew 24:36 347
Matthew 25:15-16 357
Matthew 25:31-36 217
Matthew 26:28 11
Matthew 26:38 260
Matthew 27 204
Matthew 27:20 48
Matthew 27:46 219, 223
Matthew 27:51 10
Matthew 28:18 386
Matthew 28:18-20 436
Matthew 28:19-20 455, 512
Matthew 28:20 345
Mark 1:15 359
Mark 13 12, 298, 301, 303, 304, 313, 332, 356, 359
Mark 13:14 275
Mark 16:16 436
Luke 2:2 56
Luke 3:5 347
Luke 3:7 308
Luke 4:14-20 107
Luke 8:25 72
Luke 10:1-3 458
Luke 10:38-42 108
Luke 12:49-51 340
Luke 17:6 72
Luke 18:9-14 14
Luke 20 53
Luke 20:6 52
Luke 21 12, 298, 301, 303, 304, 312, 313, 332, 356, 359
Luke 21:6 360
Luke 21:20-22 309, 320
Luke 21:20-24 360
Luke 21:20-28 307
Luke 21:21-22 357
Luke 21:24 288, 312
Luke 21:32 320
Luke 22:20 56
Luke 22:24-26 61
Luke 22:26 62
Luke 23:26-31 312
Luke 23:28-30 312
Luke 23:30 312
Luke 24:44-48 201
Luke 24:44-49 476
John 1:1-4 13
John 1:1-14 219
John 1:10-13 144
John 1:11 248
John 1:14 135, 260, 505, 509
John 1:40-42 456
John 1:45 456
John 2:6 465
John 2:15-17 106
John 3:14-18 134
John 3:16 220
John 3:16-18 437
John 3:16-21 194
John 3:17-18 260
John 3:36 455
John 4:22 351
John 6:27-29 225, 265
John 6:29 153
John 6:32 455
John 6:35 455
John 8:31-32 9
John 8:31-34 141
John 9 63, 462, 465, 466, 467, 469

John 9:1-5 224, 265
John 11:35 236
John 13:34-35 209, 214
John 14:6 9, 458, 486, 508, 522
John 14:15 177, 381, 406
John 15:12 230
John 15:25 161, 365, 488
John 16:12-13 478
John 16:32-33 240
John 17 418, 460
John 17:1-5 260
John 17:10 282
John 17:11 50
John 19:15 282, 361
John 21:22 343
Acts 1:4 512
Acts 2 511, 513
Acts 2:1-47 511
Acts 2:5-12 512
Acts 2:17 304
Acts 2:17-21 305
Acts 2:36 9
Acts 2:38 15, 516
Acts 2:47 107
Acts 4:8-12 519
Acts 4:12 10, 245, 437, 504, 505, 519, 521, 523
Acts 5:17 494
Acts 5:27 14
Acts 5:31 15
Acts 5:36 47, 48, 72
Acts 6:7 72
Acts 7:10 56
Acts 8:26-40 476, 478
Acts 8:30-31 476
Acts 8:34 476
Acts 9:13 248
Acts 10:34-43 220
Acts 10:42-43 15
Acts 10:43 15
Acts 12:13 72
Acts 13 126
Acts 13:1 141
Acts 13:14-16 107
Acts 13:25 436
Acts 13:26 481
Acts 13:32 15
Acts 13:32-33 15
Acts 13:38-39 15, 220
Acts 15:1-2 131
Acts 15:1-5 139
Acts 15:2 145
Acts 15:22 57, 60, 62
Acts 16:6 233
Acts 16:14 436
Acts 16:15 437
Acts 17:1-4 475
Acts 17:2 478
Acts 17:4 53
Acts 17:7 282
Acts 17:11 313
Acts 18:4 53
Acts 19:8 48, 53
Acts 19:26 53
Acts 20:28 107, 441
Acts 26:2 58, 62
Acts 26:2-3 61
Acts 26:26-29 45
Acts 26:28 48, 53
Acts 28:14-31 237
Acts 28:23 48, 53
Romans 1 162, 366, 393, 481
Romans 1:5 171, 375, 402
Romans 1:16 455
Romans 1:16-17 155, 481
Romans 1:17 161, 162, 163, 165, 166, 168, 171, 172, 176, 365, 366, 367, 369, 370, 372, 375, 376, 380, 393, 394, 396, 397, 399, 402, 403, 406, 435, 482, 483, 486, 489
Romans 2:8 49, 53
Romans 3 176, 380, 405
Romans 3:2-24 170, 374, 401
Romans 3:19-20 136, 165, 369, 396, 487
Romans 3:20 170, 374, 401
Romans 3:21 165, 166, 369, 370, 398, 487
Romans 3:21-24 396, 455
Romans 3:21-26 522
Romans 3:21-31 216
Romans 3:22 180, 384, 408
Romans 3:22-26 228, 268
Romans 3:23 508, 522
Romans 3:23-24 488
Romans 3:24 161, 168, 365, 372, 399, 488
Romans 3:25-26 138, 166, 370, 397, 488
Romans 3:28 141
Romans 3:31 149, 163, 171, 177, 367, 375, 381, 395, 406, 485
Romans 4 168, 372, 399, 486, 489

Romans 4:4 167, 371, 398
Romans 4:5 167, 180, 371, 384, 398, 408
Romans 4:6 167, 371, 398
Romans 4:6-25 178, 382, 406
Romans 4:8 167, 371, 398
Romans 4:13 167, 371, 398
Romans 4:16 141
Romans 4:24 167, 371, 399
Romans 5 164, 169, 368, 373, 396, 400, 438, 485
Romans 5:1 168, 180, 372, 384, 399, 408
Romans 5:8 245
Romans 5:9 482
Romans 5:9-11 228, 268
Romans 5:15 400
Romans 5:15-19 169, 373, 400
Romans 5:21 168, 372, 399
Romans 6 173, 377, 385, 386, 396, 438, 482, 483
Romans 6:1-4 443
Romans 6:1-7 147
Romans 6:1-14 223
Romans 6:4 389, 450
Romans 6:5-10 386
Romans 6:12 70
Romans 6:12-18 173, 377, 403
Romans 6:15-18 147
Romans 6:16-22 163, 367, 394, 484
Romans 6:17 148
Romans 6:18 162, 175, 217, 366, 379, 394, 404, 482
Romans 6:19 163, 367, 395
Romans 6:22 162, 366, 394
Romans 7 163, 164, 180, 367, 368, 384, 395, 396, 408, 438, 485
Romans 7:4 163, 367, 395
Romans 7:7 164, 368, 395
Romans 7:12 164, 368, 395
Romans 7:14-25 163, 367, 394, 484
Romans 7:22 164, 165, 226, 266, 368, 369, 395, 396
Romans 7:25 164, 368, 395
Romans 8 164, 368, 396, 438, 485
Romans 8:4 163, 367, 394
Romans 8:31-33 246
Romans 8:35 256
Romans 8:38-39 228, 268
Romans 8:39 485
Romans 9:1 159, 363
Romans 9:30 139
Romans 10:1-3 180, 384, 408
Romans 10:1-11 486
Romans 10:1-17 179, 383, 407
Romans 10:1-21 434
Romans 10:3-4 163, 367, 393, 394
Romans 10:4 170, 177, 374, 381, 401, 406
Romans 10:5 168, 372, 399
Romans 10:8-15 453
Romans 10:11-13 437
Romans 10:13 437
Romans 10:15-16 436
Romans 10:16 49
Romans 10:17 49, 435, 436, 437
Romans 10:19 303, 321
Romans 10:20 330
Romans 12 81, 173, 377
Romans 12:1 171, 375, 482
Romans 12:1-2 226, 266, 439, 440, 442, 445
Romans 12:8 80, 81
Romans 12:9-21 226, 266
Romans 12:11 109
Romans 14 19, 47, 173, 377, 409, 410, 417, 419, 425
Romans 14:1 19, 90, 461, 496
Romans 14:1-4 20, 420
Romans 14:5 20, 22, 461
Romans 14:14 54
Romans 14:17 239
Romans 15:1-7 173, 377
Romans 15:5-6 425
Romans 15:5-7 419
Romans 15:7 425
Romans 16:17 409, 410, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 492, 495, 501
Romans 16:20 310
Romans 16:25 461
Romans 16:27 429
1 Corinthians 1:2 246
1 Corinthians 1:10-13 238
1 Corinthians 1:18 436
1 Corinthians 1:21 506
1 Corinthians 1:30 169, 216, 228, 255, 373, 399, 401, 485, 490, 523
1 Corinthians 1:30-31 167, 371, 407
1 Corinthians 1:301 393
1 Corinthians 2:1-2 257
1 Corinthians 2:2 522
1 Corinthians 2:6 56

1 Corinthians 2:10 478
1 Corinthians 3:1-23 495
1 Corinthians 3:5-10 210, 215
1 Corinthians 5:1 7
1 Corinthians 5:15 390, 450
1 Corinthians 6:19-20 442, 454
1 Corinthians 7:31 327
1 Corinthians 8 47, 415, 417
1 Corinthians 8:1 20, 497
1 Corinthians 8:1-3 460
1 Corinthians 8:1-12 420
1 Corinthians 10:11 357
1 Corinthians 10:17 442
1 Corinthians 10:32-33 71, 83
1 Corinthians 12:27 247
1 Corinthians 15:54 505
1 Corinthians 15:58 210, 255, 455
2 Corinthians 1 43
2 Corinthians 1:9 54
2 Corinthians 1:24 31, 41, 42, 43
2 Corinthians 2:5-7 7
2 Corinthians 5:9-21 447
2 Corinthians 5:11 54, 387, 448
2 Corinthians 5:11-12 388, 448
2 Corinthians 5:13-14 461
2 Corinthians 5:14-21 507
2 Corinthians 5:17 341, 385, 386, 447, 452, 453, 458
2 Corinthians 5:17-21 210, 216, 219, 454, 509, 523
2 Corinthians 5:18 436
2 Corinthians 5:18-21 390, 451
2 Corinthians 5:19 170, 178, 374, 382, 517
2 Corinthians 5:19-21 457
2 Corinthians 5:20 387, 448
2 Corinthians 5:21 179, 383, 407
2 Corinthians 6:17 176, 380
2 Corinthians 7:10 7
2 Corinthians 11:16-33 241
2 Corinthians 11:22-23 258
2 Corinthians 13:3 224
2 Corinthians 13:5 223, 386
2 Corinthians 13:5-10 109
Galatians 1 124
Galatians 1:3-5 129, 137
Galatians 1:4 126, 139
Galatians 1:6-9 42, 93, 124, 125, 127, 128, 129, 130, 134
Galatians 2:5 131
Galatians 2:8 168, 372, 399
Galatians 2:15-16 136
Galatians 2:16 150, 151, 155, 170, 374, 401
Galatians 2:20 132, 261
Galatians 2:20-21 137
Galatians 2:21 133, 484
Galatians 3:6-12 149, 150
Galatians 3:10-13 177, 381, 406
Galatians 3:11 135, 483
Galatians 3:13-14 137
Galatians 3:16 310, 317
Galatians 3:22 136
Galatians 3:23-25 136
Galatians 3:26 137
Galatians 3:26-29 141, 144
Galatians 3:29 141
Galatians 4:1-7 441
Galatians 4:3 340
Galatians 4:3-7 340
Galatians 4:4-5 234, 260
Galatians 4:12-20 139
Galatians 4:16 140
Galatians 4:21-6 319
Galatians 4:26 287
Galatians 5 494
Galatians 5:1-5 146
Galatians 5:4-5 386
Galatians 5:7 48, 49, 54
Galatians 5:13-15 155
Galatians 5:16-25 252
Galatians 6:1 7
Galatians 6:2 128
Galatians 6:7-10 154
Galatians 6:15 341
Ephesians 1:3 114
Ephesians 1:3-14 114, 115, 144
Ephesians 1:3-22 438
Ephesians 1:4 235
Ephesians 1:7 15
Ephesians 1:9 113
Ephesians 1:17 115
Ephesians 2:4-7 220
Ephesians 2:4-9 221, 264
Ephesians 2:8-9 136
Ephesians 2:8-10 148, 153, 233, 245
Ephesians 2:10 220, 245, 263
Ephesians 2:11-22 118
Ephesians 2:12 522

Ephesians 2:13 522
Ephesians 3 117
Ephesians 3:3 116
Ephesians 3:10-11 118
Ephesians 3:18 115
Ephesians 4:1 230
Ephesians 4:1-4 118, 119
Ephesians 4:1-6 418, 423
Ephesians 4:1-7 495
Ephesians 4:3 425
Ephesians 4:3-14 111
Ephesians 4:4 247
Ephesians 4:5 112, 133
Ephesians 4:11-12 478
Ephesians 4:11-13 84
Ephesians 4:17 120
Ephesians 4:22 385
Ephesians 4:23 261
Ephesians 4:25-32 121
Ephesians 5:1-2 261
Ephesians 5:1-8 121
Ephesians 5:8-11 388, 449
Ephesians 5:11 112, 122
Ephesians 5:18 45
Ephesians 5:19 91, 112, 121, 473
Ephesians 6:1 49, 70
Philippians 1 230
Philippians 1:1 243, 246
Philippians 1:1-7 243
Philippians 1:3-9 221
Philippians 1:3-11 211, 216
Philippians 1:6 235
Philippians 1:7 245, 246
Philippians 1:12-14 237, 243, 256
Philippians 1:21 256
Philippians 1:27 221, 264
Philippians 1:27-28 209, 214, 231
Philippians 2:1-8 41
Philippians 2:1-11 115, 239
Philippians 2:3 209, 214
Philippians 2:5 254, 260, 261
Philippians 2:5-8 209, 214
Philippians 2:5-9 177, 381, 406
Philippians 2:6 58, 61, 62
Philippians 2:6-8 259, 260
Philippians 2:8 177, 381, 406
Philippians 2:9-11 262
Philippians 2:12 211, 216, 220, 221, 223, 263, 264
Philippians 2:12-13 208, 211, 213, 216, 218, 219, 245, 263
Philippians 2:12-18 505
Philippians 2:13 210, 211, 215, 216
Philippians 2:14 251, 254
Philippians 2:14-16 250
Philippians 2:14-18 250
Philippians 2:15 252
Philippians 2:16 436
Philippians 2:25 58
Philippians 3:1 236
Philippians 3:1-11 139
Philippians 3:2-6 240
Philippians 3:3 236
Philippians 3:3-4 54
Philippians 3:7 58
Philippians 3:7-11 258
Philippians 3:8 258
Philippians 3:12-21 255
Philippians 4:2-3 238
Philippians 4:4 257
Philippians 4:4-6 239
Philippians 4:5 234
Philippians 4:8-9 234
Philippians 4:8-11 438
Colossians 1:14 13
Colossians 2:1-2 115
Colossians 2:1-3 115
Colossians 2:2 115
Colossians 2:8 339, 340
Colossians 3:1-3 506
Colossians 3:1-4 387, 447
Colossians 3:1-10 222
Colossians 3:9 385
Colossians 3:22 70
Colossians 4:2-4 227, 267
Colossians 4:14 105
Colossians 4:16 107
1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 249
1 Thessalonians 2:1-3 387, 448
1 Thessalonians 5:10 390, 450
1 Thessalonians 5:12 62, 63, 81
1 Thessalonians 5:13 58
2 Thessalonians 1:8 70, 251, 437
1 Timothy 1:12 62
1 Timothy 3:4 79, 80
1 Timothy 3:4-5 80
1 Timothy 3:5 79

1 Timothy 3:12 79
1 Timothy 4:1 308
1 Timothy 5 78
1 Timothy 5:17 30, 77
2 Timothy 1:3-12 480
2 Timothy 1:8-9 481
2 Timothy 2:8 13
2 Timothy 2:15 475
2 Timothy 3:1 308
2 Timothy 3:16-17 177, 381, 406
2 Timothy 4:9-13 105
Titus 1:5-16 42
Titus 1:11-15 222, 264
Titus 2 220, 263
Titus 2:4-7 220, 263
Titus 2:9-15 154
Titus 2:11 164, 368
Titus 2:11-12 235
Titus 2:11-14 395
Titus 2:12-14 162, 175, 366, 379, 394, 404
Titus 2:12-15 482
Titus 2:15 77
Titus 3 497, 501
Titus 3:3 148
Titus 3:5-8 245
Titus 3:8 81, 221, 264
Titus 3:9-11 491
Titus 3:10 491, 492, 493, 494, 496, 498, 500, 501
Titus 3:10-11 21, 426
Titus 3:14 81
Hebrews 1:1-2 13, 299, 303
Hebrews 1:2 357
Hebrews 1:10-12 300, 301
Hebrews 2:1-4 12
Hebrews 2:14-18 261
Hebrews 3:7 252
Hebrews 3:7-15 13
Hebrews 3:12-14 442
Hebrews 5:7-9 177, 381, 406
Hebrews 6:4 251
Hebrews 6:9 52, 53
Hebrews 8:13 319, 323, 327, 358
Hebrews 9:11-15 13
Hebrews 9:24-28 8
Hebrews 9:26 505
Hebrews 9:27 508
Hebrews 9:28 310
Hebrews 10 104
Hebrews 10:11-18 13
Hebrews 10:16-18 327
Hebrews 10:19-26 104
Hebrews 10:22 105
Hebrews 10:24 10
Hebrews 10:24-25 107
Hebrews 10:25 12, 104, 108, 235, 303, 440, 517
Hebrews 10:25-26 7
Hebrews 10:26 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14
Hebrews 10:26-28 328, 346
Hebrews 10:26-31 10
Hebrews 10:29 10, 58
Hebrews 10:30 321
Hebrews 11:6 434
Hebrews 11:8 70
Hebrews 11:11 58
Hebrews 11:26 58
Hebrews 12:1-3 231, 254
Hebrews 12:22 323
Hebrews 12:22-27 311
Hebrews 12:25-29 358
Hebrews 12:26-27 344
Hebrews 13 43, 61, 62, 67, 72
Hebrews 13:1-5 47
Hebrews 13:1-17 19, 25, 72
Hebrews 13:5-6 241
Hebrews 13:7 28, 31, 41, 47, 57, 58, 60, 62, 78, 83
Hebrews 13:15-16 227, 267, 439
Hebrews 13:17 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 73, 76, 77
Hebrews 13:20-21 228, 268, 389, 449
Hebrews 13:24 61, 62
James 2:10 164, 368, 396, 485
James 2:14 151
James 2:14-18 175, 379, 404
James 2:14-25 149, 150, 153
James 2:17-18 234
James 2:23 178, 382, 406
James 3:3 67, 68, 77
James 5:1-3 308
James 5:7-9 329, 357
James 5:8 357
1 Peter 1:1 333
1 Peter 1:5 308
1 Peter 1:8-12 488
1 Peter 1:10-12 117, 478
1 Peter 1:10-13 115

1 Peter 1:18-19 254
1 Peter 1:20 473
1 Peter 2:1-3 252
1 Peter 2:9-10 454
1 Peter 2:9-12 248
1 Peter 2:11 249
1 Peter 2:11-12 455
1 Peter 4:7 12, 329, 347, 357
1 Peter 4:8-10 262
1 Peter 5:1-3 19
1 Peter 5:1-5 41, 42
1 Peter 5:3 63
2 Peter 1:1 435
2 Peter 1:13 58
2 Peter 1:19-20 474
2 Peter 1:20-21 473, 474, 475, 476
2 Peter 2:13 58
2 Peter 3 316, 319, 330, 332, 333, 345, 348, 361
2 Peter 3:3 308, 347
2 Peter 3:3-4 332, 333
2 Peter 3:4 347, 357
2 Peter 3:7 318
2 Peter 3:10-1 329
2 Peter 3:10 333, 338, 339, 340, 347
2 Peter 3:10-13 319, 329, 335, 345, 346, 347
2 Peter 3:13 340
1 John 1:8 461
1 John 1:9 15
1 John 1:10 461
1 John 2 464, 470
1 John 2:1-2 12, 13, 251
1 John 2:15 110
1 John 2:18 308
1 John 2:19-26 12
1 John 2:22-23 459, 467, 468
1 John 3:11-15 261
1 John 3:19-20 508
1 John 4:1-3 459, 468
1 John 4:9 390, 450
2 John 1 459
2 John 2:15-17 224
2 John 4 470
2 John 7 466, 468
2 John 9 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471
2 John 10 464, 468
3 John 9 46
Jude 3 148
Jude 12 324
Jude 18 308
Revelation 1 319, 361
Revelation 1:1 269, 270, 271, 282, 359
Revelation 1:1-3 269, 270, 352, 360
Revelation 1:9 359
Revelation 1:16 324
Revelation 2:4 14
Revelation 3:6 22
Revelation 3:14-22 109, 224
Revelation 3:19-20 16
Revelation 6:12-14 336
Revelation 6:12-16 336
Revelation 6:12-17 300, 301, 312, 313, 353
Revelation 6:14 336
Revelation 9:11 276
Revelation 11:1-3 306, 360
Revelation 12 319
Revelation 12:6 306
Revelation 12:13-15 306
Revelation 13 269, 278, 286, 288, 295
Revelation 13:1-7 294
Revelation 13:1-8 286
Revelation 13:4 286
Revelation 13:16-18 274
Revelation 13:18 286, 289
Revelation 15:1-4 313
Revelation 15:2-3 321, 322
Revelation 16:14 314
Revelation 16:16 298
Revelation 17 269, 278
Revelation 17:9-11 278
Revelation 17:9-12 287
Revelation 17:10 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 289
Revelation 17:10-11 290
Revelation 17:15 324
Revelation 20:4 353
Revelation 20:11 329
Revelation 21:1 318, 319, 320
Revelation 21:1-2 220, 323, 337
Revelation 21:1-4 304
Revelation 21:1-5 331
Revelation 21:2 287, 319
Revelation 21:2-2 348
Revelation 22:6 355
Revelation 22:7 272, 273
Revelation 22:10 356
Revelation 22:12 273

Revelation 22:17 14, 252
Revelation 22:20 273